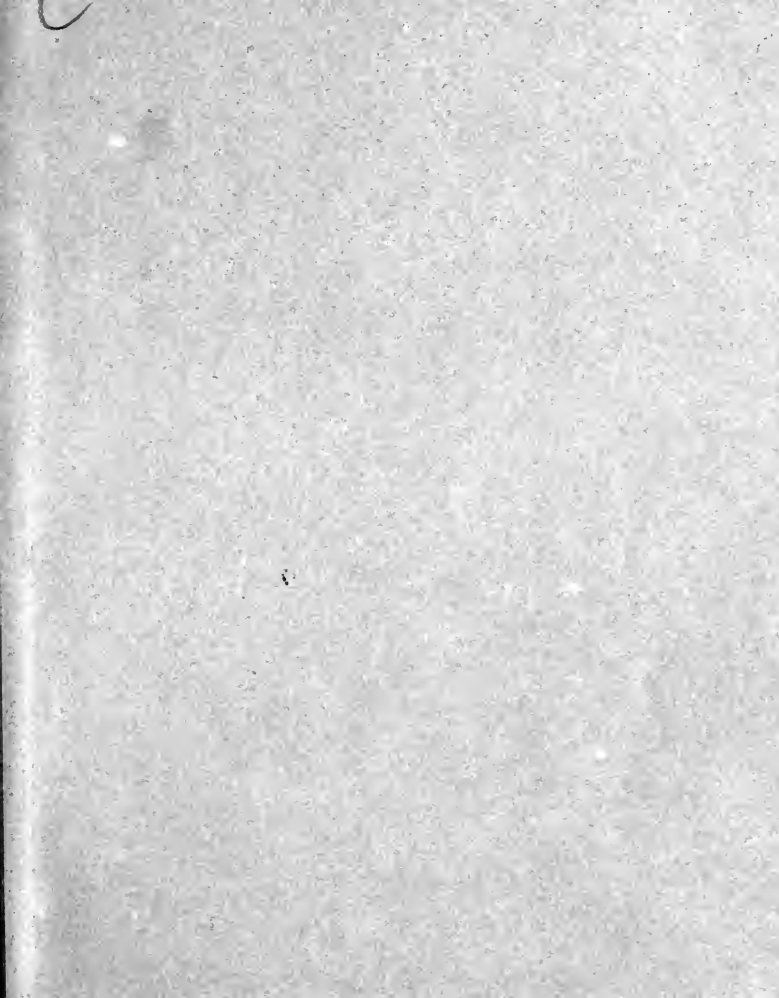


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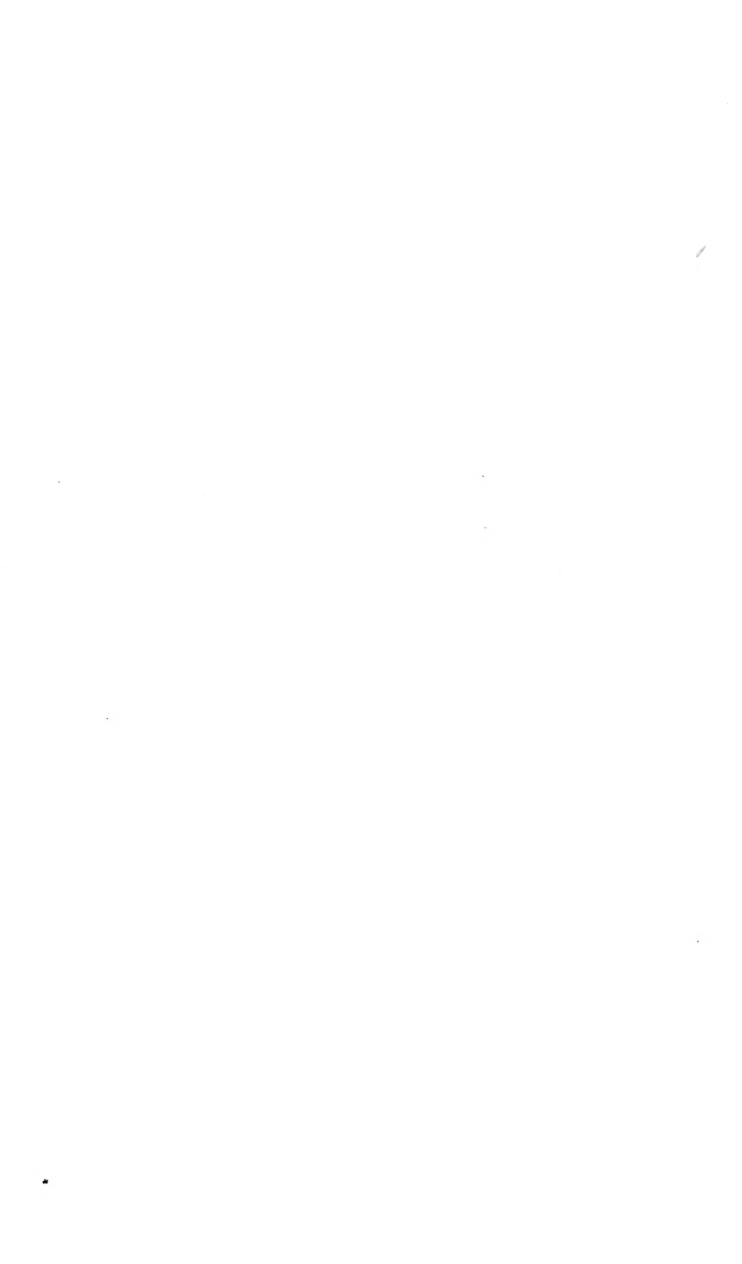
The rationale of religious  
enquiry











THE  
RATIONALE OF RELIGIOUS ENQUIRY,

OR

THE QUESTION STATED OF REASON, THE BIBLE, AND THE CHURCH;  
IN SIX LECTURES.

BY JAMES MARTINEAU.



“To seek our Divinity merely in Books and Writings, is *to seek the living among the dead*: we do but in vain seek God many times in these, where his truth too often is not so much *enshrined as entombed*. No; ‘*intra te quære Deum*,’ seek for God *within thine own soul*: he is best discerned *νοερῶ ἐπαφῇ*, as Plotinus phraseth it, *by an intellectual touch of him*.”—Dr. SMITH of Cambridge, *Select Discourses*, 1673, p. 3.

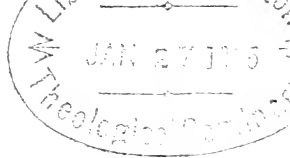
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## PREFACE

TO THE THIRD EDITION.

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Soon after the publication of the first edition of this book, the author was asked by a friend, whether he thought that the opinions which characterized the volume could be regarded as "*ultimate*." As no one can foresee the future changes of his own mind, he answered with an affirmative. But the expression remained in his memory; and now that he is obliged to re-open his half-forgotten work after the lapse of so many years, he is struck with the pertinence of the question, and sees how much more sagaciously a man may be interpreted by his critics than by himself. In fact, it is not without hesitation that he has consented to re-issue a book, of whose faults he has acquired so profound a sense, and in which few topics are presented in the manner that now seems to him the best.

On reflection, however, he is convinced that the preparation of this new edition is an act not in any way unfaithful

to truth, but only humiliating to himself. For, the alteration in his point of view which somewhat estranges him from this volume, consists not in the reversal, but in the further unfolding and prosecution, of its judgments ; and in the acquisition of other views so related to these, as to form their complement, and greatly to diminish their apparent magnitude. The path which he has indicated, through the controversies and sophistries of the day, he still believes to be a right one ; and though well aware how small a way it leads, he leaves it open for those to whose doubtful feet it may afford true, though temporary, guidance.

The same considerations which have prevailed with the author to re-issue this book, have induced him to leave it without material alteration. Had it contained opinions which he deemed false, and arguments which he perceived to be unsound, the duty would have been imperative, and the difficulty trivial, of recanting the opinions and refuting the arguments. But to render the volume an expression of his present modes of thought would have required much less than this in one way, and much more in another ; without involving the recall of any important statement, it would have demanded such a recast of the whole construction, and such a change in the complexion of the sentiment and language, as could not have been made without destroying the identity of the book. Other occasions either have arisen, or may arise, for supplying what is most defective, and limiting what is too absolute, here. Every one whose mind goes through any thing like a history, must be content either to remain silent, or to say one thing at a time.

There is, however, one opinion maintained in the preface to the second edition, and omitted in this, which it would be disingenuous to pass without a word. The name *Christian* is there denied to the class of persons usually called *Antisupernaturalists*; and for that denial reasons are given which the Author does not now think to be conclusive in their whole extent. He was not at that time acquainted with any form of Antisupernaturalism but one: that which professes to *account for* Christ and Christianity, and to discern the system of second causes to which all the characteristics of the religion and its author may be referred. To this scheme of belief he still thinks it improper to apply the term *Christian*. Those who hold it may entertain opinions *concurrent with the views of Christ*; but perceiving clearly, as they imagine, how he came by them, they regard him, at best, not as the Master of their faith, but as fellow-pupil with them of the same arguments. Whoever sees in Christ, not an original source of truth and goodness, but only a *product* of something else, is destitute of the attitude of mind constituting religious *discipleship*; which implies, not that we have been convinced by the reasoning of an equal, but that we have been subdued by the authority, and possessed by the intuitions of a higher mind. To take something *on trust*, to feel its self-evidence, to bend before its revealer as above ourselves—human indeed as he speaks to our consciousness, divine as he transcends our analysis—appears to be essential to the disciple, and to constitute the difference between scientific agreement and religious faith. This state of mind, however, which recognizes what is beyond nature in Christ, and owns a divine and “supernatural”

authority in his religion, may co-exist with doubt, or even disbelief, in the miracles recorded in the Scriptures. Such scepticism may arise in an enquirer's mind without altering in any way his religious classification. Nothing more is implied in it than simply a new estimate of certain historical testimony, a new conception of the manner in which the early Christian literature assumed its present form, without the slightest change of reverential posture towards the great Object which this medium presents. This species of doubt constitutes, therefore, no disqualification for discipleship ; and those who are possessed by it may be as truly Christian as the stoutest believer in the plagues of Egypt and the demons in the swine.

There is a broad distinction to be drawn between *philosophical anti-supernaturalism*, which regards a miracle as *per se* incredible, and disowns whatever is irreducible to necessary causation, and *historical anti-supernaturalism*, which, from a critical estimate of testimony, questions certain particular miracles, without any abatement of the preternatural claims of the religion in whose records they appear. The former wholly excludes the idea of *revelation*, and gets rid of every thing that presents itself as an object of wonder and worship ; it is, therefore, in the author's opinion, essentially irreligious, and is prevented, only by the want of logical strength and clearness in those who hold it, from lapsing into materialistic Atheism. The latter in no way interferes with the persuasion of an inspiration from the living God ; it rather shifts the ground than lessens the amount of supernatural belief, and transfers to the *soul* of Christ whatever wonder has been lost



from his outward *life*. Hence it is perfectly compatible with the acknowledgment of his divine authority to any required extent, and leaves the Christian characteristics wholly undisturbed.

The matter which is here adverted to has its roots too deep within the very substance of religious philosophy, to admit of its being further pursued in this place. The foregoing hints will suffice to show how far the author's assent is given and how far denied, to the reasonings of a very remarkable letter from the late Blanco White, which he presents in the Appendix to this edition. It was that letter to which he considered himself as replying in the preface of the second edition. It will now be seen by his readers, as well as by himself, how imperfect and unsatisfactory was that reply ; and though he is still far from concurring in all the statements of the letter, he laments that his friend and correspondent is beyond the reach of this partial confession. The wisdom of that accomplished man, however, was of an order to win posthumous converts, in tardy compensation for contemporaneous obloquy.

*Liverpool, Jan. 27, 1843.*



## CONTENTS.

### LECTURE I.

	PAGE
INSPIRATION . . . . .	1

### LECTURE II.

CATHOLIC INFALLIBILITY . . . . .	19
----------------------------------	----

### LECTURE III.

PROTESTANT INFALLIBILITY . . . . .	37
------------------------------------	----

### LECTURE IV.

RATIONALISM . . . . .	53
-----------------------	----

### LECTURE V.

RELATION OF NATURAL RELIGION TO CHRISTIANITY . . . . .	74
--	----

### LECTURE VI.

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON MORALITY AND CIVILIZATION . . . . .	89
--	----

### APPENDIX.

PORTION OF A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR, FROM THE REV. J. BLANCO WHITE . . . . .	105
NOTES . . . . .	133



# LECTURE I.

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## INSPIRATION.

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JOHN XIV. 26.

BUT THE COMFORTER, WHICH IS THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER WILL SEND IN MY NAME, HE SHALL TEACH YOU ALL THINGS, AND BRING ALL THINGS TO YOUR REMEMBRANCE, WHATSOEVER I HAVE SAID TO YOU.

NEAR the eastern margin of the gigantic empire of Rome, lay a small strip of coast which had been added to its dominion by Pompey the Great. The accession had excited little notice, eclipsed and forgotten amid the crowd of greater acquisitions, and in itself too insignificant to excite even the ready vanity of conquest. The district had nothing in it to draw towards it the attention of a people dazzled by the magnitude and splendour of their own power. Remote from the existing centres of opulent and cultivated society, with a language unknown to educated men, destitute of any literature to excite curiosity, or any specimens of art to awaken wonder, it would have lain in exile from the great human community, had not the circulation of commerce embraced it, and self-interest secured for it a surly and contemptuous regard. It lay between the fallen kingdoms of Egypt and Assyria, but derived no distinction from its position; it seemed covered with the dust, without sharing the glories of their ruined magnificence. Its inhabitants were the most unpopular of nations;—a people out of date, relics of a ruder period of the world,—having the prejudices of age without its wisdom,

and the superstitions of the East without its loftiness :—they had long been deserted by the tide of civilization, now flowing on other shores, and were left without the refreshment of a sympathy. And as hatred stimulates ferocity, and contempt invites men to be mean, they retreated into the seclusion of all unsocial passions. They detested : they despised : they suspected : they writhed under authority : they professed submission only to obtain revenge : they had no heritage in the present ; content with nothing which it brought, they had no gratitude to express : their afflictions were for the past and the future ; and their worship was one of memory and of hope, not of love. Fair and fertile as were the fields of Palestine, it was held to be the blot of the nations, the scowl of the world.\*

In a hamlet of this country, sequestered among the hills which enclose the Galilean lake, a peasant, eighteen centuries ago, began to fill up the intervals of worldly occupation with works of mercy and efforts of public instruction.† Neglected by his own villagers of Nazareth, he took up his residence in the neighbouring town of Capernaum ; and there, escaped from the prejudices of his first home, and left to the natural influence of his own character, he found friends, hearers, followers. He mixed in their societies, he worshipped in their synagogues, he visited their homes, he grew familiar with their neighbourhood, he taught on the hill side, he watched their traffic on the beach, and joined in their excursions on

\* Dum Assyrios penes Medosque et Persas Oriens fuit, *despectissima pars servientium*. Postquam Macedones præpotuere, rex Antiochus demere superstitionem, et mores Græcorum dare adnixus, quo minus *teterrimam gentem* in melius mutaret, Parthorum bello prohibitus est.

Quia apud ipsos fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed *adversus omnes alios hostile odium*.—Tacitus, Hist. v. 8. 5.

† The tradition which represents Jesus as sharing the calling of Joseph rests upon a passage of Justin Martyr :—*ταῦτα γὰρ τὰ τεκτονικὰ ἔργα διαγάζετο ἐν ἀνθρώποις ὢν, ἄροτρα καὶ ζυγά. διὰ τούτων, καὶ τὰ τῆς δικαιοσύνης σύμβολα διδάσκων καὶ ἐνεργῇ βιόν.*—Dial. cum Tryph. 88.

the lake. He clothed himself in their affections, and they admitted him to their sorrows, and his presence consecrated their joys. Their Hebrew feelings became human, when he was near; and their rude nationality of worship rose towards the filial devotion of a rational and responsible mind. Nor was it altogether a familiar and equal, though a profoundly confiding sympathy, which he awakened. For power more than human followed his steps; and in many a home there dwelt living memorials of his miracles: and among his most grateful disciples there were those, who remembered the bitterness of the leper's exile, or shuddered at the yet unforgotten horrors of madness. That the awe of Deity which was kindled by his acts, and the love of goodness which was excited by his life, might not be confined to one spot of his country, twelve associates were first drawn closely around him to observe and learn, and then dispersed to repeat his miracles, report and teach. They were with him when the recurring festivals summoned him, in common with his fellow-citizens, to leave awhile Capernaum for Jerusalem. They beheld how his dignity rose, when his sphere of action was thus enlarged, and the interest of his position deepened;—when the rustic audience was replaced by the crowd of the metropolis, and village cavillers gave way to priests and rulers, and the handful of neighbours in the provincial synagogue was exchanged for the strange and gaudy multitudes that thronged the vast temple at the hour of prayer. In one of these expeditions, the fears of the established authorities, and the disappointment of a once favouring multitude whose ambition he had refused to gratify, combined to crush him. It was soon done; the Passover at Jerusalem was its assizes too: the betrayal and the trial over, the execution was part of the annual celebration, a spectacle that furnished an hour's excitement to the populace. But there were eyes that looked on with no careless or savage gaze;—of one who knew what he was in childhood;—of many that had seen his recent life in Galilee. The twelve, too,

lingered closely around the event ; and *they* say that he came back from death, spake to them oft for forty days, and was carried before their view beyond the precincts of this earth.

Here is a series of events deeply interesting indeed to those who were immersed in them ; but of which, even on the spot where they occurred, it might have been expected, that within one generation their very rumour would have died away, lost in the stir and cares of life. A few months began and ended them ; an obscure recess of the world was acted upon by them. They concerned one of a social class, which is beneath the proud level of history, and whose vicissitudes, after a few years, are added to that dark abyss of forgotten things, above which gigantic vices and ambitious virtues struggle to be seen. They are, moreover, the simple record of a private life, coming in almost at the death of ancient history, and overshadowed by its pageantry, the miracles themselves rendered insipid, except for their benevolence, by its prodigies. Yet this fragment of biography did not die ; it not only lived, but it gave life ; it recast society in Europe, and called into being a new world.

Providence then sent out these events upon a mission. They had some function and office. *What were they for ?* To inquire after *their end*, to go in quest of the *design* which they were to accomplish, is to seek a reply to the question, *What is Christianity ?* If we discover the purpose of Christ's life, we have found Christianity.

How are we to effect this discovery ? what direction must our minds take, in order to learn what this history is for ? what resources are at hand for this purpose ? what *materials* exist, and what *method* must be followed, for the investigation ? The problem is, what was the intent of Christ's coming ? The preliminary question is, what are our *instruments* for solving the problem, and what kind and degree of value must be set on each ?

First, we have the books which, when bound up together,



are called the New Testament ; books written by persons who saw Christ and talked with him, or at any rate loved him, and instructed others of the first age respecting him. These must help us to learn the aim of Providence in this remarkable piece of history.

Secondly ; the Pope and the authorities of the Romish Church assure us, that they can whisper the secret in our ears ; that they have private sources of information, on which we may certainly depend.

Thirdly ; Protestants of all grades declare that, though they should be ashamed to talk about the kind of private information before mentioned, they have yet paid a great deal of attention to the subject, and are quite sure they have made the whole thing clear ; indeed so demonstrably clear, that it is by far the most prudent course for a man not to encourage scruples about the creeds and articles, in which they have explained the truth.

Fourthly ; our own reason steps in, and entreats to have a voice in the decision. It urges us not to adopt any theory about Christ's mission, which does violence to the conclusions it has already drawn from other quarters. It begs to preserve entire its own faith, and to hold every interpretation of this history false, which cannot consist with it. There are, in particular, two sets of notions which reason thinks it ought not to be required to part with in favour of any theory of the Gospel.

*First*, the ideas of religion and morals which it has learnt by the study of nature and of human life ; in other words, natural religion : it protests against all contradiction to these, unless they can be *disproved*.

*Secondly*, the ideas it has acquired of what Christ was sent to accomplish, from observing what he actually has accomplished ; for, it urges, it would be absurd to make out by laborious study that the Gospel was meant for one purpose, and then, on turning to experience, to find that it has effected

quite another. In other words, it petitions that we will attend to the influence of Christianity on morality and civilization.

These several claims, these professed sources of knowledge, it will be the business of these lectures to examine and estimate ; so that the course collectively may be regarded as designed to determine the *best method* of solving the problem, What is Christianity? Having settled the *plan* of proceeding, perhaps the actual solution may be attempted in a future course. In the present lecture we examine the first of these instruments, viz., the books of the New Testament, with a view to learn, how we are to use them, in order to obtain an answer to the great question.

Let me then conceive myself to take up the Christian records for the first time, strip off the feelings with which habit has invested them, and lay open my mind freely to the impressions which they would make. Let me know nothing of them, but that they are the genuine productions of the age of Christ, and the work of disciples who won by bonds and death a title to be believed. Let me be a stranger to every actual Church,—a dweller in some island of the sea, visited only by faint rumours of the faith,—but with the eye and mind of a novice, called to read its documents at last. Oh, enviable state ! would that that freshness were not a dream !

It is obvious at once, that in the New Testament I have a composite work, whose unity is purely nominal ; or a collection of separate writings, as different from each other as Cicero's Letters and Livy's Histories, possessing no common end, proceeding from men who had no knowledge of each other's labours, still less any idea that the results of these labours would ever be congregated into one work. Thousands of Christians there must have been, whom neither the sight nor the report of any of them ever reached ; multitudes of churches familiar only with one or two ; and a century of Christianity without the entire collection. They exhibit a

picture of two successive periods, the two consecutive parts of the original development of Christianity ; first, the personal biography of Christ, sketched by four different hands in a manner evidently fragmentary, for one narrative contains incidents and discourses principally unknown to the others : secondly, this account of the Gospel at home is followed by the journal of its trials abroad ; when its first missionaries bare it to the nations, and threw it into the arena of the world to do battle with ancient superstitions, and—like its persecuted disciples who in the Roman amphitheatre met the beasts of the forest face to face—to grapple with those animal passions which vice had torn from their natural range, and enhungered to feed on innocence and life. The notices of this second stage appear, partly in a short diary of apostolic wanderings ; partly in a series of letters, written chiefly by the most enterprising of the Christian emissaries, to churches of his own founding, and containing incidental sketches of his preaching and their condition, of his difficulties and their prejudices, of the questions which the new faith suggested to their minds, and the intellectual and moral errors which the old ones tended to preserve. Moreover, in this set of writings, it is not easy to discover any principle which determined their selection ; there is no visible line which separates them from the others, probably equally ancient, which have been left out ; and if we could recover the Gospel to the Hebrews, and that of the Egyptians, it would be difficult to give a reason why they should not form a part of the New Testament ; and a letter actually exists by Clement, the fellow-labourer of Paul, which has as good a claim to stand there, as the letter to the Hebrews or the Gospel of Luke. If none but the works of the twelve Apostles were admitted, the rule would be clear and simple : but what are Mark and Luke, who are received, more than Clement and Barnabas, who are excluded ?<sup>1</sup> The book, then, is a somewhat casual association of faithful records, the venerable remains of the early Christianity, the production

of its fresh and earnest time, born in the midst of its conflicts, and impressed with the energy of its youth.

My next impression is, that in these writings I have to do with realities. They are natives of the scenes which they describe ; for no one but a Hebrew of that one age could so conduct me through his country as it then was, making me see everything by simply following his own accidental rambles, any more than a German could be my guide through Rome. If ever there was anything real, it is the emotions and impressions of which those works are the record. Only look at those silent pictures of localities, and living attitudes of events ;—intervening seas and countries sink, and we are there!—actually tossed upon the lake, and trembling at the gale in which Jesus sleeps ; or on the Mount of Olives, the incense of the temple below curling upwards in the morning light ; or in the very streets of Jerusalem at the hour of prayer, entering with Peter the beautiful gate, and startled to see the well-known cripple leaping to his feet. There is that sabbath day of mercy and instruction at Capernaum, when Jesus in the synagogue interpreted the duties of the day, and rebuked his sanctimonious observers, by curing the man with the withered hand. Why, we almost hear Jesus call the poor beggar from the door, and bid him stand forth in the midst of the assembly, and penetrate the sabbatarian spies by the puzzling question, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath day, or to do evil?” we see their shrinking eyes, as he looked slowly round upon them for an answer, and feel the silence amid which the withered limb was stretched forth, soon broken by the murmurs and restlessness of imbecile rage.<sup>2</sup> The different classes, too, whom Christ addressed on several occasions, the Pharisee, the Sadducee, the Samaritan, and his own immediate followers, are made known to us,—their prejudices, their characters, their condition distinctly indicated, without a sentence of description ; revealed simply by the different trains of thought which Jesus unfolds before each, the

different points from which he commences his addresses, and the different forms of life which appear in his illustrations. And this knowledge which the writers possess is clearly not systematic and theoretical, but incidental and practical ; theirs not by acquisition, but by right of birth. It is the kind of knowledge of human opinions and feelings, which is gained by men of traffic in the world ; and it comes out in brief expressions with plebeian rudeness and simplicity. Moreover, this air of reality would disappear, if there were not discrepancies in the writings which record the same transactions ;—such discrepancies as must take place among the witnesses of an event, who bring to it different feelings, who give a disproportioned attention to its several parts, or from whom the fluctuation of an eager crowd may intercept the sight of some short movement, or the sound of some short word. That these variations, continually amounting to positive, sometimes to important, inconsistencies, are not more noticed, only shows how languidly, with how little acuteness of discrimination or energy of fancy, we read the gospel history. Let any one carefully study the account in the several Evangelists of the calling of the Apostles, attending to time, place, and order, or the narratives in Matthew and in Luke of the casting of the demons into the swine, and he will see indeed the same events, the same basis of reality in all, but regarded from different points of view, and not only conceived of differently, but in some important parts actually misconceived, from the different positions of the observers.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, amid all the varieties of these writings, and notwithstanding the complete individuality of each of their authors, there is one impression which, by all of them, is fixed upon the mind with perfect unity. A pure, vivid, and single image of Christ is reflected from each, and the forms entirely coalesce in outline, though the colouring is somewhat brightened, as each in turn is superimposed upon the others. The writings have various and doubtful reasonings : they have inconclusive

appeals to the Old Testament : they have partial misconceptions of fact : they have evident misrepresentations of miracle : they have strong traces of the peculiarities of the minds from which they spring,—the confused, yet technical, order of Matthew,—the exaggerations of Mark,—the distinctness of Luke,—the tenderness and Orientalism of John,—the impetuosity of Paul, with thought at the bottom, and confusion and genius on the surface, and affectionate vigour everywhere :—but, through all the errors and delusions which were rife in that age and country, and all the singularities of individual minds, the character of Jesus shines forth in beauty identical and unique ; as if it had left an impression which it was impossible to mistake. It is the solitary universality amid the traces of time and place ; the single line of moral unity which runs through the varieties of the Christian records.

The general impression, then, which I should derive from this first survey of the books of the New Testament is, that they are perfectly human, though recording superhuman events ; that they were written by good and competent men, who reported from their own memory, reasoned from their own intellect ; who received impressions modified by their own imagination, who interpreted the ancient scriptures by their own rules, and retained the notions of philosophy which they had been taught, and of morals which approved themselves to their own conscience. They saw and felt what they wrote, and they wrote it truly.

This belief is evidently all that is necessary to constitute a disciple of Christ. One who admits that Christ really wrought the miracles ascribed to him, delivered the discourses reported in his name, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, must evidently be a Christian. If not, *what else is he ?* Belief in a revelation is obviously quite independent of any theory respecting the manner in which the books recording it were written. For are we not to class among believers those thousands who worshipped in the Christian Church, and fought the good fight of Christian faith, *before the books were*

*written*,—at least before they were known, or had given rise to any notions about their composition?

But I am assured that my first impressions of the Christian writings are wrong; that there is nothing human in their whole contents; that the persons who wrote them performed only the *material* part of the operation, and were passive agents of the Holy Spirit,—amanuenses, in fact, to its dictation: or, at all events, if they must be admitted to have furnished the ideas and language, as well as the mechanical process of writing, that their ideas were rendered infallibly correct, and the natural causes of error altogether excluded. This being the case, to penetrate to the ideas of the authors is in all cases to attain unerring truth; and we have nothing to do, but to understand the propositions, and then believe them. Interpret a portion of history, and you have a narrative perfect from the memory of God;—a piece of argument, and you have the reasoning of the Infinite intellect;—an expression of expectation, and you have a prediction from the prescience of the Most High;—a sentence of precept, and you have a positive command from the Divine will. If this be true, the feelings which in the first instance were indulged towards these works must be entirely changed. They must not be embraced with human sympathy, but approached with Divine awe. To praise their simplicity, to admire their beauty, to judge of their moral excellence, to point out the ingenuity and adroitness of their arguments, is as presumptuous and absurd as to question their accuracy, and discover in them traces of erroneous thought. What kind of critics are we of the ability of the Holy Spirit for narration, for precept, or for the exercise of logical art? We must take up the book, as we would a thing fallen from heaven; consult it, as the Roman would consult a Sibyl's leaf; read it as an oracle, borne to the daylight from the dark cavern of things invisible;—read it, however, ere it be seized by the winds of human doctrine, and thenceforth rendered incomprehensible.

Now, when this representation is made to me, the first thing that occurs to my mind is, that it must be proved. It is not by any means self-evident, and therefore I can hardly be expected to admit it to be true, simply on being told so ; and though my informants should become very angry at this hesitation, and tell me that this (which is really a demur to their assertion) is a denial of the word of God, an insult to the sacred Scriptures, nay, even the sin against the Holy Ghost, still, as it is useless *trying* to believe without any perception of evidence, I wait till this holy wrath is over, and ask and listen for a reason.

The next idea that presents itself is, that this kind of inspiration must, from the nature of the case, be exceedingly difficult to prove. Let us approach the subject a little more closely, and think what kind of evidence would be sufficient. The point to be established, let it be distinctly remembered, is this : that all the ideas in the minds of certain authors have been rendered infallibly correct. By what means could we be made *to perceive that they are so* ?

It is obvious, that a truth which is announced from heaven in one age, may be discovered by man in another. A truth is a real and actual relation of things, subsisting somewhere,—either in the ideas within us, or in the objects without us,—and capable therefore of making itself clear to us by evidence either demonstrative or moral. We may not yet have advanced to the point of view from which it opens upon us ; but a progressive knowledge must bring us to it ; and we shall then see that which hitherto was sustained by authority, resting on its natural support ; we shall behold it, indeed, in the same light in which it has all along appeared to the superior Intelligence who tendered it to our belief. Thus, revelation is an anticipation only of science ; a forecast of future intellectual and moral achievements ; a provisional authority for governing the human mind, till the regularly constituted powers can be organized. Now, the moment the second



period, of natural discovery, arrives, we perceive that it was an absolute truth which had been communicated ; we learn *then* the perfect correctness of the revealer's conceptions : the response having proved true, the trustworthiness of the oracle with respect to it is established. But it is clear, that this evidence of his exemption from error comes too late ; the truth is now reposing on its natural evidence, and needs no further support from authority ; the precise use of his inspiration was, to uphold an undiscovered reality, till its natural evidence could be found. Its efficacy, therefore, depends entirely on the date of its proof ; and if the revelation and the thing revealed come to light at the same point of time,—the moment the infallibility is made out, its necessity ceases to exist.

Perhaps, however, it will be urged that the correctness of some one announcement being once established, all others made by the same person are worthy of reliance ; that his authority, proved in one case, extends to all ; so that truths, not yet resting upon their natural evidence, may be accepted as certain from his hands. Thus if a man predicts one historical event, and it comes to pass, we are to conclude that he knows all other futurities of which he may happen to speak ; that he is equally infallible in his interpretations of ancient literature ; and that his ideas on subjects of science and morals are to be accepted as disclosures from the omniscient Mind. This position, however, cannot be maintained, unless it is held that inspiration is necessarily universal in its extent, that God cannot correct one error of a human mind without erasing all, or open one truth to it, before the time without visiting it with a blaze of boundless knowledge. Once admit that the gift of infallibility may be limited (and who so unreasonable as to deny it ?), and you cannot argue from the inspiration of one proposition to the inspiration of any more. Each one requires its own separate and individual proof.

This kind of evidence of inspiration, then, which arises from

the discovery that its communications were true—this posthumous proof of it—is of no service. We must have some earlier, some antecedent proof, enabling us to rely upon it as soon as its announcements have been sent forth. In order to serve any purpose of illumination and authority, inspiration must be rendered credible to us as soon as it takes effect.

Shall we then admit in proof *the assertion of the person claiming inspiration*? Is it consistent with the principles of evidence to receive his testimony in his own cause? No;—not even if he be the most veracious of men. It is not a case for testimony at all, or in which veracity, by itself, can be of use. For when any one brings to me the statement, “I have these ideas from God,” his integrity will indeed persuade me that he affirms nothing which he does not believe; but that he possesses sufficient grounds for this belief, it is impossible for me to feel, unless he has submitted them to my judgment, and rendered their adequacy clear. Indeed his assertion is in reality composed of two parts—a statement of fact, and a statement of opinion. His *fact* is, that he has the ideas, the doctrines; his *opinion* is, that their origin is divine. The former is absolute knowledge, which I cannot deny without impugning his veracity; the latter is inference, which I may dispute with no harsher feeling than that of speculative dissent. That he may have sound reason for his assertion, and be able to convince me of it, I do not deny. My present position is simply this; that the claim of the most upright man to inspiration amounts to no more than a statement of his own opinion about the origin of his ideas; that his moral character gives it no title to our admission; and that it is necessary to ask him for evidence before we render him our credit. If you acknowledge any other rule, and say, that personal attestation is sufficient in a question so momentous, you must admit the claims of Joan of Arc, and Joanna Southcote, and Mr. Irving, and every other enthusiast who may be self-deluded into the belief of a heavenly mission.

To apply this to the New Testament. First, however, let

me say, that (excluding the Book of Revelations, which I do not pretend to understand), from the beginning to the end, I can find no claim put forth to inspired composition or sentiment for any one of its writings. The very few passages from which such a pretension has been inferred appear to afford no ground for the inference. I will take the two which seem to be most decided.

2 Tim. iii. 16 (the translation should run thus): "All scripture, given by inspiration of God, is also profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."†

First, the Apostle speaks only of the Old Testament, the writings in which Timothy had been instructed from his youth.

Secondly, the word rendered "given by inspiration of God," is applicable to human poetry and any compositions of a loftier order. It therefore determines nothing respecting the miraculous origin of the writings.

Thirdly, even if the word did not admit of this reading, the passage would contain Paul's opinion on a point, respecting which we have no proof that he was anything more than a human judge.

My text requires a few words of explanation, to relieve it of the misconceptions which have arisen from inattention to the general scope of the passage of which it is a part, and from erroneous interpretations of the phrase "Holy Spirit." The Apostles were perplexed by the position in which they stood; their confident hope of a temporal kingdom on the verge of extinction—their Master whom they had held to be the undying Messiah, within sight of the cross, and actually taking leave of the companions who had been looking to share his glory. Their minds were not in a state sufficiently calm and clear to take in any further instruction, or embrace any juster and more comprehensive views of their Master's office, and their own destination; nay, already his attempts to enlighten

them had fallen without effect upon them; many of his sayings they had failed to comprehend. In the text, combined with a similar passage in John xvi. 15, Jesus states two things: first, that when they have been embarked awhile upon their missionary labours, these faint and forgotten impressions will be revived, and become intelligible; secondly, that the many things which he might tell them now, but which they could not bear, will then be suggested to their minds, and the blank which they now feel respecting the future will clear itself away. And these things will be effected by the Holy Spirit, *i. e.*, by their Divine commission to preach the Gospel; so that he means, that *that* commission, once put in act, will sweep away the obscurities, and supply the deficiencies which distress them. Many a saying, lost for a while from their incapacity to understand it, will rush back upon their thoughts, illuminated by the interpretation of events; and many an omission, which their state of mind renders necessary, will be made up by the natural suggestions of experience in their noble and holy office.<sup>5</sup>

Shall we say that *miracles* are an evidence of inspiration in the person who performs them? And must we accept, as infallible, every combination of ideas which may exist in his mind? If we look at this question abstractedly, it is not easy to perceive the necessary connection between superhuman *power*, and superhuman *wisdom*; many ends are accomplished by miracles, and must have been contemplated in their appointment, besides that of drawing attention to the agent's instruction. Why, for example, may they not have been designed to attract notice to his *character*? And when we look more closely to the fact, did not the minds of the Apostles retain some errors, long after they had been gifted with preternatural power? Did they not believe in demons occupying the bodies of men and of swine? Did they not expect Christ to assume a worldly sway? Did not their master strongly rebuke the moral notions and feelings of two of them, who were

for calling down fire from heaven on an offending village. It is often said, that whenever a man's asseveration of his infallibility is combined with the support of miracles, his inspiration is satisfactorily proved: and this statement is made on the assumption that God would never confer supernatural power on one who could be guilty of a falsehood. What, then, are we to say respecting Judas and Peter, both of whom had been furnished with the gifts of miracle, and employed them during a mission planned by Christ;\* and of whom, nevertheless, one became the traitor of the garden, and the other uttered against his Lord three falsehoods in one hour!

Can there then be *no* external evidence of inspiration? There might be one perfectly decisive, though of little use where there is no concurrent perception of internal proof; an audible voice, clearly supernatural, heard by a sufficient number of witnesses, and announcing a person to be infallible. If, however, the inspiration is not universal, extending throughout the whole mind, and rectifying every species of error, it would be needful that the department to which it is restricted should be specified. Such a voice fell upon no Apostle; such a voice did fall upon Christ, at his baptism and transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased;" words not vague; not affirming universal inspiration; but distinctly singling out *the one infallible point*, when they pronounce him *beloved, the object of perfect moral approbation*, the image of finished excellence, on whose fair majesty even the eye of God cannot rest without delight.

If, then, the only adequate evidence of inspiration (by which, be it remembered, I mean the Divine correction of intellectual and moral error) was not given to the Apostles; if their miracles do not prove it, and if they do not assert it for themselves,—and had they done so, we should still have required further satisfaction,—the first impressions received from their writings

\* Luke ix. 1—10.

return upon us in full force ; and we must pronounce them uninspired, but truthful ; sincere, able, vigorous, but fallible ; all in them that depends upon veracity to be received, all else open to examination ; their statements of fact to be admitted, their interpretations of them to be criticised ; their reasonings to be respected, but sifted ; their morality to be revered, but studied in its adaptation to their own age and position. Venerable and holy men ! how would they disclaim any other dignity than that of indicators to point us to their Lord ! and how shrink from otherwise acting upon our minds, than by breathing into us that trustful reverence for his character, which is itself better than intellectual inspiration, and which filled their reason with energy, their affections with fervor, and their will with human omnipotence !

## LECTURE II.

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### CATHOLIC INFALLIBILITY.

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#### MATTHEW XVI. 18.

AND I SAY ALSO UNTO THEE, THAT THOU ART PETER; AND UPON THIS  
ROCK WILL I BUILD MY CHURCH; AND THE GATES OF DEATH SHALL  
NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT.

No instructed man can deny that the Roman Catholic Church presents one of the most solemn and majestic spectacles in history. The very arguments which are employed against its rites remind us of the mighty part which it has played on the theatre of the world. For when we say that the ceremonies of its worship, the decorations of its altars, and the evolutions of its priests, are conceived in the spirit of Heathenism, how can we forget, that it was once the witness of ancient Paganism, the victor of its decrepit superstitions, the rival, yet imitator of its mythology? When we ask the use of the lights that burn during the mass, how can we fail to think of the secret worship of the early Christians, assembled at dead of night in some vault beyond the eye of observation? When we wonder at the pantomimic character of its services, its long passages of gesticulation, are we not carried back to the time when the quick ear of the informer and persecutor lurked near, and devotion, finding words an unsafe vehicle of thought, invented the symbolical language which could be read only by the initiated eye? Long and far was this Church the sole vehicle of Christianity, that bare it on over the storms of ages, and sheltered it amid the clash of nations. It evangelized the

philosophy of the East, and gave some sobriety to its wild and voluptuous dreams. It received into its bosom the savage conquerors of the North, and nursed them successively out of utter barbarism. It stood by the desert fountain, from which all modern history flows, and dropped into it the sweetening branch of Christian truth and peace. It presided at the birth of art, and liberally gave its traditions into the young hands of Colour and Design. Traces of its labours, and of its versatile power over the human mind are scattered throughout the globe. It has consecrated the memory of the lost cities of Africa, and given to Carthage a Christian, as well as a classic, renown. If in Italy and Spain, it has dictated the decrees of tyranny, the mountains of Switzerland have heard its vespers mingling with the cry of liberty, and its requiem sung over patriot graves. The convulsions of Asiatic history have failed to overthrow it; on the heights of Lebanon, on the plains of Armenia, in the provinces of China, either in the seclusion of the convent, or the stir of population, the names of Jesus and of Mary still ascend. It is not difficult to understand the enthusiasm which this ancient and picturesque religion kindles in its disciples. To the poor peasant who knows no other dignity it must be a proud thing to feel himself the member of a vast community, that spreads from Andes to the Indus; that has bid defiance to the vicissitudes of fifteen centuries, and adorned itself with the genius and virtues of them all; that beheld the transition from ancient to modern civilization, and forms itself the connecting link between the old world in Europe and the new; the missionary of the nations, the associate of history, the patron of art, the vanquisher of the sword.

No one who has faith in the Providence of history, and believes that, even in the successions of error, there is some adaptation to human wants, can persuade himself to speak with contempt of a religion which has been permitted to occupy such a place in the world's annals. As surely as there is a



Ruler of life, and a Father of Jesus, He would never suffer a system utterly depraved to fill the human mind, and be the sole conservator of the gospel, during such a reach of ages. It is not to be supposed that he has been baffled all this time in his purposes, and compelled to witness a useless Christianity ; or why did he not reserve the gift, till it would no longer fail of accomplishing its mission ? From a religion which has had to wind its way through the darkest ages and the foulest recesses of society, it is no doubt very easy to gather a multitude of superstitions and crimes ; and there are clerical agitators, who assume the office of theological censors of antiquity, and find a pleasant occupation, in sweeping together the errors, and scandal, and enormities of a thousand years, and leaving them as a disgrace at the door of the Vatican. With such a temper I have no sympathy. Rather would I seek to discover what function God has assigned to this faith in the economy of the world. Nor perhaps is this impossible to discover. In society and nations, as in individuals, the human capacities unfold themselves in succession ; memory, imagination, passion, before intellect. And during the period when those earlier faculties held the ascendancy, and, in fixing on objects of veneration, the understanding was not yet consulted, the Catholic religion was well suited to human wants. Folded in the mystic mantle of tradition, or secreted in the forms of picturesque ceremony, or visible through the glow of affectionate fiction, the essential truths of Christianity found a living access to the heart and conscience of mankind.

At this first stage, however, of human progress, we no longer stand. To our acts of veneration now, the suffrage of the understanding has become indispensable. No fascination of the fancy can now be so complete, no preoccupation of the feelings so triumphant, as to be secure against all disturbance from the reason. The ideas of *faith* and of *truth* have approached more and more nearly to each other ; and however much imagination there may be in our belief, there must at

least be *some* logic. It is here that the Roman Catholic system (in common, however, with most of its Protestant rivals) breaks down. It professes to assist us in our search after truth ; to possess a private oracle of its own, whose answers to every inquiry are inspired : it tenders to us, not doctrines, whose evidence we are to examine ; but decisions, before whose authority we are to bow. It assumes the perfect inspiration of the Apostles, and takes it for granted, that to reach their ideas is to attain unquestionable truth. Even this fundamental position was shown in my last lecture to be false ; for while the Apostles' assertions of fact are to be received, their statement of opinions and system of inferences are open to investigation. But we may allow this to pass. The knowledge which the Roman Catholic Church promises to give, is, at all events, of extraordinary value ; it offers to put us in possession, by peculiar and infallible sources of information, of the apostolic ideas. Before we accept its offer, it will be well to inquire whether it really has the means of performing what it promises.

The following is the theory of the Roman Catholic faith. The Apostles of Christ delivered their instructions in two different ways : by writings, designed for churches at a distance ; and by speech, addressed to disciples near. Both these were of the same value ; nor did the society which received a letter under the hand of an Apostle, possess any advantage over one that listened to his living voice. Hence, from these two methods of tuition, we have two distinct depositories of Christian truth, of precisely co-ordinate rank : scripture, or the recorded thoughts of the Apostles ; and tradition, embodying their oral instructions. Once reach these and understand them, and you have guides infallible. But *there* is the difficulty ; for there are false scriptures, forged and apocryphal books, which it would be fatal delusion to confound with the true : and there are false and worthless traditions, the inventions, not of Apostles, but of heresiarchs,

and leading directly away from the source of truth. Moreover, when all spurious authorities have been rejected, and none but genuine scripture and tradition are before us, to interpret them is found no easier task than it was to select them : ambiguities and obscurities bewilder us ; of a multitude of possible meanings, we know not which to prefer ; we are distracted with the anxieties of doubt which perils salvation. Were there no further resource, Christianity must teem with contradictions, and crumble instantly into innumerable heresies. It cannot be thus, that Christ would fulfil his promise, to “ be with ” his disciples “ always, to the end of the world.” The inspiration of the Apostles did not die with them ; they transmitted it to their successors,—an ultimate appeal to the end of time. Somewhere, within the circle of the Church, their infallibility survives ; the unerring oracle for the solution of doubt, and the determination of faith. Respecting the precise seat where this divine attribute resides, the opinions of Roman Catholics are divided : some affirming that it is centred in the Bishop of Rome ; others ascribing it to the ecclesiastical councils, which are summoned to represent the universal Church, the decisions of which, however, are not infallible, till they have received the Papal sanction.<sup>1</sup> Is it an unholy curiosity that tempts one to ask where exactly, in this latter case, the inspiration dwells ? Inspiration means a preternatural correction or exclusion of error, and communication of truth ; it denotes a positive Divine action upon the mind. An infallible *man*, then, is something intelligible ; but when you tell me of an infallible *assembly*—an inspired parliament, whose decrees are nevertheless liable to error, till confirmed by the signature of a certain bishop, I try in vain to conceive, where the divine agency can take place, of what separate atoms of inspiration the collective miracle is made up, from what distribution of influence on the faculties of the several parties the elimination of error results. Every individual member in his separate capacity, and before he

entered the assembly, is perfectly fallible ; when there, he utters the very opinions which he brought thither, and tenders the vote which he previously designed ; yet the aggregate of these fallibilities is inspiration ! And if the Pope should see fit to put his veto on the decision of the majority, forthwith the inspiration is metamorphosed back into error ! Nor do the ecclesiastical Fathers help us to any solution of the difficulty ; for one of the historians of the Nicene council,—the most important council ever held, which determined the triumph of Trinitarian over Arian Christianity,—assures us that in the tumult of angry voices, multitudes of reverend bishops fought the battles of the faith in the dark, understanding nothing of the propositions before them,—passive vehicles, no doubt, of a wisdom not their own.<sup>2</sup> For myself I confess, that the mere difficulty of conceiving this miracle would produce an incredulity, which scarce any evidence would overcome. When I remember the motives which actuate the members of such assemblies, and of the vehement operation of which no reader of ecclesiastical history can doubt ;—the anxiety for imperial favour, or dread of popular displeasure ;—the love of display, the passion for influence, the ambition of promotion ;—the dread of episcopal molestation, and the hope of party triumph, and the horror of the reputation of heresy, —I look in vain for the resting-place of the divine and guiding light ; it escapes me like an *ignis fatuus*, quitting every point on which I gaze ; and goes out at last in these mists and marshes of human corruption !<sup>3</sup>

Leaving, however, this difficulty, which attaches only to one view of Catholic infallibility, I ask, what is the use of this inspired oracle, supposing it to exist ? what is the peculiar office which it is fitted to perform ? The answer is easy ; the object is, to supply us with an authority, to whose announcements reason must absolutely submit ; to deliver us from the precarious and capricious tribunal of private judgment ; to give us certainty in the place of probability, and Divine

evidence instead of human. The faith thus administered is imagined to be a gift from the mind of God, enjoying perfect immunity from the instability of human inference; and it is the function of this unerring guide, to rescue us from our own understandings, and impart a conviction *more than rational*.

Now when we use this language, and talk of the submission of our belief, we employ a metaphor which is deceptive and mischievous. Belief cannot submit; belief is an act of the understanding, submission an act of the will; belief is perfectly involuntary, and is determined by *evidence*; submission perfectly voluntary, and is determined by *motives*. I believe my friend to be an upright man; without some apparent change in him, no effort of will can make me think him a knave. I believe the pyramids of Egypt to be the work of human hands; no volition of mine can persuade me that they have stood there from eternity. I believe the letters to the Corinthians to have been written by Paul; and while the evidence of their genuineness remains before my mind, I cannot think them spurious; bribes and fears are lost upon me; and whatever I may profess, I cannot will any change of opinion; submission is impossible. There is but one way in which a renunciation of belief can take place; viz., by presenting a balance of proof against it: the impression of one set of evidences cannot be overpowered, but by the stronger impression of opposite evidence; and this is all that can be meant by the submission of reason: it is the exchange of one judgment of the mind for another, which seems better supported. There is no cessation of the faculty, no deliverance from the understanding; but simply a transference of its assent from one proposition to another, a transference occasioned by the occurrence of new considerations of evidence to the mind.

If, then, you wish me to relinquish a credible doctrine, the nature which God has given me leaves you but one method: you must present me with something contradictory to it which

is more credible. If it is to some authority that the concession is to be made, you must establish the authority on better evidence than can be claimed by the doctrine. I cannot renounce a conviction on the bare *assertion* of your inspiration ; give sounder reasons for your inspiration than I have for my conviction, and my understanding will yield at once. We have to do then, after all, with a balance of judgments, a question of natural evidence, a deliberation of fallible reason. It is to this tribunal that inspiration itself must be brought : its existence hangs on a link of human inference : to the chain of doctrines which it sustains it can impart no stability superior to its own ; the fragility, the uncertainty, of the first process descends, by inevitable necessity, to them ; all alike are human and fallible. The response can have no greater certainty than belongs to the oracle that utters it. Where, then, is the boasted security from error, if infallibility itself must be discovered *fallibly*, if the source of *certainly* be itself but a *probability*, if that which emancipates us from the perils of inference is an inference itself? Vain and futile is the attempt to get rid of the exercise of reason, and replace it by any thing of higher authority. Ingenuity can do no more than thrust back the appeal a step or two. And all that we gain by the theory of divine authority is this : that we resort to evidence in choosing our authority, instead of in choosing our doctrine ; our faith is still staked, whole and entire, upon the decisions of our fallible understandings. In every endeavour to elevate ourselves above reason, we are seeking to rise beyond the atmosphere, with wings which cannot soar but by beating the air.

This consideration deprives the doctrine of infallibility of all its peculiar value, even if it can be established. It can no longer impart credibility to any thing which is self-contradictory and wholly irrational : it can no longer assume the tone of command to the intellect, insist on its prostration, and demand that the impressions of doubt and perplexity be dismissed,

as the suggestions of a sinful understanding. My belief in the sacred oracle is on a level with those hated impressions themselves—a conclusion of the same sinful understanding from which they proceed. However probable the existence of an inspired authority may be rendered, it cannot lead me to renounce a tenet which is *equally probable*; and if the evidence *against* any doctrine appears greater than that *for* the authority which recommends it, it has no conceivable claim upon my belief. A divine right, therefore, to dictate a perfectly unreasonable faith cannot exist; its office must be limited to the recommendation of points already possessing intrinsic evidence. The utmost that it can do is, by its own clear proof, to turn a weak probability into a strong one. Having thus restricted the possible functions of this divine commission, we may proceed to sift the evidence of its existence, as a fact, in the Roman Catholic Church. The theory, be it remembered, is this: both scripture and tradition are liable to distortion by individual reason, and therefore useless by themselves as guides to truth; to give them efficacy, Christ and the Apostles have bequeathed to the hierarchy of Rome, a divine right and power to interpret and define their meaning.

I.—This claim is rested upon scripture. Yet, in the same breath, we are assured that scripture can prove nothing till this claim is established. How is this infallibility to have its origin in writings whose first use and meaning originate in its decrees? Turn which way he will, the Roman Catholic becomes involved in the circuit of this rotatory reasoning; he ascertains his inspired guide by the sense of scripture, and the sense of scripture by his inspired guide. In his first search, then, in the process of discovering the unerring guide, in his scriptural investigation of its seat, he is abandoned to his own resources, a follower of his individual judgment, a dependant on private interpretation; he descends by necessity to a level with the Protestant, quitting his oracular elevation, and standing on the unconsecrated ground of reasoning and good

sense. The more, therefore, he says of the tricks and phantasies of private judgment, the more he laments the depravation of the human understanding, the more he expatiates on the ambiguity and insufficiency of the Bible, without a divine expounder, and derides its perversion by the fancy of meddling interpreters—the deeper does he involve his own discovery in doubt, and challenge contempt upon his own oracle. What security can he possess that his own construction of the sacred writings—the construction on which he stakes everything in his subsequent faith—is not one of those tricks, and distortions, and heresies, which he charges upon the natural interpretations of reason? Or, if he insists that his unaided faculties are worthy of confidence, when they extract from scripture the notion of church infallibility, why not, when they elicit any other doctrine? The charge of insecurity against our conclusions recoils directly upon his own; and the boast of confidence for his own is equally available for ours.

Still it is maintained, that the Apostles bequeathed their inspiration to posterity, and handed it down by a lease of lives renewable for ever. We ask the title, and are referred to the scriptures. To the scriptures let us go.

1. My text is adduced as the strongest proof of this divine gift—as indeed the original form of bestowment. The entire passage must be taken into consideration. The Apostles, just returning from a missionary excursion, had been repeating to Christ the several popular opinions respecting his character and office. Peter, personally appealed to, avows his belief that they all fall short of the truth, and that Jesus is no other than the Messiah: and in answer, Christ exclaims (Matt. xvi. 17-19), “Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter (a rock); and upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of death shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and what-



soever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."

Now, whatever promise may be contained in this obscure announcement, one thing is evident ; that it makes no mention of any one person beyond the individual Apostle ; it is perfectly silent respecting any official successor, or any particular locality, or any future age ; unless, indeed, by the word *Peter* we understand the Bishops of Rome for evermore ! Unhappily, however, Peter held an office that was neither localised nor transferable. It was not *localised*, for the apostolic commission was, to go to all nations, testifying *everywhere* : whether he was ever in Rome, except to undergo imprisonment, is altogether doubtful ; and he was no more Bishop of Rome (*i. e.*, president over its church) than he was of Antioch or of Damascus. It was not *transferable* ; for its sole function was to *bear testimony*, to carry about the attestation of an eye and ear witness to the facts and labours of Christ's life, and the reality of his resurrection. He could no more therefore transmit his office to a successor, than give his own senses to another. Nor is there the slightest reason for limiting to Peter individually the announcement of Christ, and excluding his companions in the apostolic office ; for in another conversation, recorded in Matt. xviii. 18, the very same investiture with authority is tendered to them all : " Whatsoever *ye* bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever ye loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." With respect to the signification of the whole passage—mystification apart—it is not difficult to discover it. Christ first praises the faith of Peter, because it has not been revealed by flesh and blood, but by the Father in heaven : was not of human, but of holy origin ; not worldly, but sacred ; not borrowed from other men's opinions (for it had just appeared, that no one held Jesus to be of higher dignity than John or Elias), but deduced by the natural influence of good sense and honest piety from the

power of God in the miracles of Christ. Such a temper is the gospel's rock, on which it may abide the storms of persecution and the tide of time. To such a mind may be safely intrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven ;—not any control over the dispensations of the future life, but the administration and government of the Christian churches ; for who that reads the scriptures with an open eye needs to be told, that the kingdom of heaven means the new religion, the beneficent sway of Christianity in the world ? To his Apostles, then, represented at that moment by Peter, Jesus consigns full discretionary power to direct, as they will, the affairs of his church, and superintend the diffusion of the glad tidings ; they may bind and loose, *i. e.*, open and shut the door of admission to their society, as their judgment may determine : employing or rejecting applicants for the missionary office ; receiving with openness, or dismissing with suspicion, candidates for instruction, according to their estimate of the qualifications of the one and of the motives of the other. Their uprightness of conviction and singleness of heart are a proof that they are worthy of this confidence, and will keep only the great ends of truth in view.

This promise, then, was not limited to Peter, but belonged to all the Apostles.

It had exclusive relation to the office which they personally held.

That office had no reference to the awards of a future life.

It was in its own nature absolutely untransferable, and incapable of being bequeathed.

And Peter's share of it was never localised in Rome.

2. In the second letter of Peter, i. 20, are the celebrated words which declare, that “no scripture is of any private interpretation.” If by this be understood, that no private individual, by the exercise of his natural faculties, can ascertain the true meaning of the sacred writings, the whole passage is

turned into incoherence and absurdity; for the Apostle is actually exhorting the disciples to whom he writes to consult and study those very books which, according to this view, would be unintelligible, and, possibly, misleading to them. The whole appearance of argumentative force in these words depends upon a mistranslation so considerable, as to leave the entire passage without discoverable meaning. The Apostle having appealed in proof of the divine mission of Christ to the miracle of the transfiguration, of which he was himself a witness, passes on to the evidence which his Lord's prophecies, and those that were supposed to announce his coming, afforded. He very accurately defines the nature of prophetic evidence, when he compares it to a light that shines at first in darkness, but gives way at length to perfect illumination: for awhile the predicted event is unintelligible and obscure; but when at length it actually occurs, the darkness clears away, and the verification is as clear as the day; *the announcement has no intrinsic solution*, but is interpreted by its own accomplishment. "We have also the sure word of prophecy; to which ye do well that ye attend, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts; knowing this, that no prophecy of scripture containeth its own solution."

II.—The scriptural evidence of Catholic infallibility failing, the claim takes refuge with tradition. We are assured that there is ancient and venerable tradition in favour of the Roman See, affirming it to be "the greatest and most ancient and illustrious church," and ascribing to it a "superior headship." \* Now this new appeal is liable, at the outset, to the same objection as the argument from scripture. The very use of the inspired authority of which we are in quest is, to pronounce upon the truth and value of tradition; so that this reasoning proposes to prove infallibility by tradition, and tradition by infallibility; and, if, in order to magnify the impor-

tance of this unerring criterion of truth, you declaim on the uncertainty of tradition without it, you sap the very foundation on which you now offer to rest the stupendous structure of Romanism. Here is the dilemma. Is unaided tradition precarious? Then so is the oracle which you adduce it to prove. Is it definite and unambiguous? Then there is no enigma for the oracle to solve.

But let us look a little more closely into this mysterious *tradition*, and endeavour to estimate it at its worth. It is a name for a multitude of tales and reports that were afloat in the early ages of Christianity,—the hearsay of the church,—compounded of fact and fiction, of the marvellous and the sober, of the probable and the absurd, thrown together in one indissoluble mass. To confide the perpetual miracle of infallibility to such proof as this, betrays surely extraordinary notions of the value of evidence. You say, those reports are ancient, running back into actual contact with the apostolic generation. Possibly; and the practice of rejecting the authority of Paul, and of drunkenness at the Lord's Supper, were more ancient still, as well as the tradition, that there was no resurrection; for in the very writings of Paul they stand rebuked. As there is nothing so ancient as absurdity and sin, apostolic antiquity is no proof of apostolic truth and righteousness.

These traditions are embodied in the writings of a class of persons called the *Fathers*.\* I have called them *a class*; but in truth they have about as little in common with each other as the authors whom we call classical. Some wrote in Greek, others in Latin; some composed histories, some poems, some works of philosophy; most, treatises of theology. They severally lived in the towns of Europe, Asia, and Africa,

\* For an acute and highly interesting answer to the question, "Who are the Fathers?" I would beg to refer my readers to Rev. J. Blanco White's "Second Travels of an Irish Gentleman in search of a Religion." Vol. I. Chap. 7.

and were scattered over many centuries. In original character, in attainments, in intellectual and moral excellence, they differed, of course, as widely as any equal number of men of any other time or place. Their voluminous and tedious writings are valuable as furnishing a picture of the times, and showing the progress of ecclesiastical corruption, and tracing back, by an ascending chain, the books of the New Testament towards the apostolic age. But that any one who has really read much of these productions can think with respect of the authors' judgment, or without disgust of their temper, or without suspicion of their morals, is one of many wonders of theology. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius, may perhaps be regarded as exceptions. But that the silly credulity of Epiphanius, the implacable fury of Tertullian, the frantic bigotry of Jerome,<sup>5</sup> should have received the canonization of Christendom, is a profanation of the name of sanctity, and an insult to the understanding and conscience of mankind. The following may be taken as specimens of the venerable traditions with which we are furnished by these authors, and among which is ranked the infallible authority of Rome.

Irenæus, called the Divine, was acquainted with many who conversed familiarly with the Apostles, and thence became a great collector of apostolical traditions. He affirms that our Saviour lived to an old age, or was at least fifty years old at the time of his crucifixion; this he asserts, first, from *the reason of the thing*; for, "as Christ came to save all men of all ranks and degrees, so it was necessary that he should pass through all the several stages of life, that he might be a pattern to them all; secondly, from the *unanimous tradition and positive testimony* of all the old men, who had lived with St. John and the other Apostles, and from whom, he says, they all received this account, and constantly bore witness to the truth of it." "Yet," says Middleton, "this *unanimous*

*tradition*, so solemnly vouched by this venerable Father, is as certainly false as the Gospels are true.”\*

Tertullian, one of the most popular of the Christian Fathers, reports that St. John was thrown, without injurious effect, into a vessel of boiling oil; he came out, says Jerome, in finer and more vigorous condition than before.†

He assures us, that for forty days a fine city was seen suspended over Judæa, and the miracle acknowledged by a multitude of Gentile witnesses.‡

Jerome, the favourite writer of Roman Catholic antiquity, the author of the Latin version read in their Churches, solemnly declares, that he had been castigated all night by angels for reading the heathen works of Cicero and Virgil.§

Is it possible that, after all, the infallibility of Rome is to descend to the level of these absurdities, to repose on the same traditional authority? How are the mighty fallen!

In our search after Christianity, then, no help can be afforded us by the pretensions of infallible authority. They can neither deliver us from the imperfections of our own reason, nor bear the test to which our reason insists on submitting them. Indeed, the extreme weakness of the arguments by which the theory of Church Inspiration is supported, is, to

\* Iren. lib. ii. c. 39, quoted by Middleton, in his “Free Enquiry into the Miraculous Powers, &c.” p. 45. London, 1749.

† Refert autem Tertullianus, quod Romæ missus in ferventis olei dolium, purior et vegetior exiverit, quam intraverit.—Hieron. op. Tom. IV. par. 2. Edit. Benedict. p. 169.

‡ Constat enim, ethnicis quoque testibus, in Judæa per dies quadraginta matutinis momentis civitatem de cœlo pependisse, omni mæniorum habitu, evanescente de profectu diei, et alias de proximo nullam.

§ Inter verbera,—clamare cœpi, ‘miserere mei, Domine; miserere mei.’ Hæc vox inter flagella resonabat. Tandem ad præsentis gennæ provoluti qui adstiterant, precabantur ut veniam tribueret adolescentiæ, et errori locum penitentiae commodaret: exacturus deinde cruciatum si gentilium literarum libros aliquando legissem.—Hieron. op. Tom. IV. par. 2. Edit. Benedict. p. 414.

one who loves to think well of his fellow-men, a consideration profoundly melancholy. In studying the history of human opinion, the most satisfactory phenomenon which can present itself, next to the wide prevalence of comprehensive and beneficent truths, is the existence of sturdy and plausible errors ; of errors so akin to reason, with structure so intricate and foundation so deep, that few understandings could be expected to analyse them and lay them bare. Such fallacies, while they remind us of the difficulties which impede the progress of human knowledge, leave unharmed our more generous estimates of human virtue : for they excite no suspicion against the universal sincerity of those who have professed them, and suffer us to believe that even the acutest intellects have been fairly mastered by their subtleties. But the hypothesis of ecclesiastical infallibility is really so untenable—it so completely defies the utmost ingenuity to give it a decent show of probability, and falls so ready a victim to the first threat of thought—as to render the impression irresistible, that multitudes who have upheld it must have seen its hollowness, and maintained it, not as an honest truth, but as a legal fiction—justified, not by its evidence, but by its expediency.<sup>6</sup> However astonishing may be the triumphs of sincere fanaticism—however great the power of religion to introduce absurdities into the mind under cover of its sanctity—it is too much to suppose, that of the long line of Roman Pontiffs, not one should have been conscious of his fallibility, while adopting the style of inspiration. The triple crown has encircled many a strong head, astute and ambitious in the diplomacy of courts, and little penetrated with the enthusiasm of the devotee : and by these men, as well as by numbers of the more intelligent among both priesthood and laity, the theory of Church Infallibility must have been regarded as a mere contrivance of policy, useful for managing the mass of the population. Compared with this enormous immorality, all error is innocuous. It implies a preference of fictions over realities—a distrust of

truth, which is the worst form in which scepticism of Providence can break out. It indicates an antisocial contempt for the human mind, a suspicion respecting the stability of the great principles of morals, a disbelief in the progressiveness of the higher civilization, which are the most fatal of all vices in those who rule mankind. The church or the nation that relies, for the maintenance of its faith or institutions, on principles of influence so ignoble, fosters within it the inevitable causes of decrepitude and decay.



## LECTURE III.

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### PROTESTANT INFALLIBILITY.

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ROMANS XIV. 4.

WHO ART THOU THAT JUDGEST ANOTHER MAN'S SERVANT ?

THAT was a noble fight, which was fought by Luther and his printing press, when they rescued the Bible from the grasp of priests, and turned it from the charter of an incorporated tyranny into the patent of universal freedom. If the most solemn æra of the world's history was that in which Christ himself walked its fields in Palestine, and refreshed its weary heart with the living spectacle of heavenly virtues, and entered death that he might illustrate life, and, as he ascended, bequeathed to all generations the dignity and responsibility of an immortal hope ; the next in interest is the period when the *true record* of those things was brought again beneath the eye of men, and to the ear of thought the voice of Christ was made to speak once more, and the image of his mind was sent round the homes of the people, and went about, like himself, doing good. If that book is to fulfil its appointed function, as the sinner's conscience, and the mourner's friend, and the oppressor's foe, it must be accessible to all men, in all stations of life and moods of mind ; not dealt out only in the place of pulpits, and spoiled by the voice of preachers, and

selected by the will of priests ; but abandoned, whole and entire, warning and promise, history, parable, miracle and prophecy, to the reason and the heart of all whom it may concern. The inquirer must have it, whenever the anxiety of doubt, or the spirit of speculation, urges him to its page ; and he can borrow from it the solution of some perplexity, or shed on it the illumination of fresh thought. The sorrowing must have it, whenever the waywardness of grief may make it welcome, and to the touched heart there may be a gentleness in its voice of comfort, and a brilliancy in its scenery of hope, that may make them sacred to the memory for ever. The proud must have it, that, when no eye is on him but that of God, he may hear the withering words with which Christ could blight the Pharisee, and witness how mean is every distinction compared with that moral dignity which could raise the outcast from the dust, and seek the friendship of the publican, and praise the virtues of the Samaritan. The penitent must have it, that, at the happy moment, the eye of Christ may look into his heart, and bid it sin no more ; and when the first effort is tempted to relax, his spirit of untiring duty may put weariness to flight ; and when the self-gratulation of victory creeps in, the immense ambition of future progress may absorb the silly vanity of present attainment. The tyrant must have it,—he that tramples on happiness and life for his own vile greatness, and hews a way of guilt and woe to an eminence of praise and hate,—that he may learn of a tribunal above, which frowns while it forbears, and waits only till the last drop of his brother's blood shall have cried to it from the ground. The slave, too, must have it, to tell him the incredible story of his origin and his end,—to whisper to him (if he can but believe so strange a thought to be a truth and not a mockery) the equal responsibility of all men ; to persuade him that the end is not yet, nor this earth an image of the skies ; that while here he is degraded, abandoned to an animal nature, sometimes pampered, and sometimes tortured, left without

duties because without rights, he goes in the great multitude of bond and free to that world where he will discover what he is worth in the creation of God, feel the mighty stirrings of a moral nature within him, and find, in verity, that of one blood, of one law, of one destiny, has God made all nations.

So far then as the Reformation effected the diffusion of the scriptures,—the book of duty, the book of liberty, the book of life,—it should be regarded with gratitude by all times. But there is room for much delusion, and there is much affectation, in the fashionable panegyrics on the Reformation. In order to produce its beneficent effects, the Bible must be left to its natural agency; must fairly come in contact with the open and unbiassed mind of men, and deliver its own reports unquestioned, and exercise its own influence unwatched. There must be no meddling with its genuine and simple impression. Without this the dissemination of the scriptures is a mere mockery; and yet of this we have enjoyed no experience to this day. The Reformers emancipated the Bible from Catholic theology; but it was only to enslave it to their own. They did not, indeed, adopt the suspicious-looking plan of partially withholding the book from the popular eye, and avowedly reserving in their own hands the administration of its contents; the Protestant churches have discovered other and more wily ways of giving currency and authority to their own interpretations. There is no need to print them in the scripture itself; it is as well to get the credit of circulating it without note or comment. What can seem fairer or more truth-loving than this compact and complete Bible, without a remark, without even a running title, with nothing but the old and venerable words from Genesis to Revelation (except, indeed, certain spurious passages, still thought to be convenient by those who know them to be forgeries)? But do you suppose this book will be trusted to go by itself among the people? It would be a great mistake. Preachers will go before it, and tell them what they are to find in it; creeds will go after it, and ask them if they

have found it. If not, intimations are given that they had better look again ; and while the search is going on, a clamour, as of a multitude, is kept up ; on the one side a chorus of sweet promises announces all tempting things in earth and heaven, to him that finds the pearl ; on the other a discord of ill names, and insults, and horrors, and holy condolence, and assurances of absolute perdition, to him that misses it. All these oral notes are exceedingly effective ; they are as powerful, without being quite so barefaced, as the ingenuous pretension to infallibility. They keep the Bible surrounded with a whole atmosphere of commentary, invisible itself, but colouring everything. They betray a rooted and irreverent distrust of the scriptures, a determination to haunt their steps, and privately overhear their teachings, and poison their pure and simple impression wherever they go. With all their boasting, not a book exists of which Protestants are so much afraid as the Bible.

I propose to illustrate this ; and to show that wherever one particular interpretation of the scriptures is held to be essential, all the evils which arise from ascribing infallibility to a common human mind exist without abatement. With this view, let us take to pieces the theories of the Roman Catholic and Protestant religions ; examine their fundamental principles ; trace them so long as they agree, and point out precisely where they diverge, especially seeking to discover the supposed *seat of certainty* in each.

All men, except the atheist, will agree that there is infallibility *somewhere* ; a mind, that is, all whose ideas are in the order of truth, and all whose emotions in the beauty of excellence. The supreme intelligence of God, within whose immensity the scheme of creation was projected as a magnificent picture, ere it was executed as a living reality, can mistake nothing within its circuit. Every leaf in the immense forest of events was present to his view ere the first seed was dropped on the bleak mountains of time. Those material

forces which the collective genius of man is toiling for centuries to compute, are, with all their vastness and all their subtilty, for ever pierced by his solitary intuition. The far spaces of which science labours to reach some faint vision, the theatre of other worlds, the regions of stellar light, lie, with ourselves, as a vivid point within his consciousness. Our minds—the minds of all created beings, their rapid glances of thought, their successions of emotions, their flutterings of desire, their silent sorrows, their aspirations of duty, their order of progress, and speed of ascent up the heights of the future are unforgotten scenes in the great drama, whose evolutions he is leading on. God, indeed, the primal cause of all, does not discover outward truth, but invent it ; does not perceive relations, but devise them ; does not behold the beautiful, but create it ; does not admire objective goodness, but originate it. Yet it is in the process of discovery that fallacies creep in ; in the perception of relations that errors find a place ; in the estimate of beauty that perversions of fancy intrude ; in the verdict of moral sentiment that the judgments of conscience mistake. He whose nature can receive no impressions, for he is the source of all ; he to whom the very universe is not an external thing, but an object of introspection, for his mind embraces it ; he, to whom neither past nor future are distant obscurities, for they consist of events stirring within his present thought, is by his own nature without possibility of error. There, at least, in that inaccessible abyss of glory, infallibility exists.

Both the Catholic and the Protestant are further possessed with the idea, that this infallibility is communicable ; that there is a depository of it somewhere upon the earth ; that by the transference of some portions of it thither, it is brought within reach of man ; and that, when we have once found its appointed vehicle, it is accessible to our minds. They agree, moreover, that its seat is in the Scriptures. The Catholic indeed instals tradition in the same rank of oracular certainty,

and thus creates a partnership of inspiration ; but both base their systems on this fundamental proposition ; that in the scripture resides the infallibility of God. One step further they proceed together ; they both maintain, that a reception of the ideas embodied in the sacred writings is indispensable ; that its truths are *essential*, *i. e.*, belief of them a fixed condition of salvation ; so that to deny the sense of Scripture, is to rebel against the unerring authority of God, and cast oneself into the eternal gulf. Between the two rival churches, then, there is an accordance in these two ideas ; that infallibility resides in the Scriptures ; and that an assent to their teachings is necessary to the immortal life in heaven.

Here, however, a separation takes place. For while the Catholic maintains the infallibility of scripture, he maintains also its impenetrable obscurity ; the original ideas are unerringly true, but are embodied in language which is open to misconception, and may excite in us notions different from those that dwelt in the apostolic mind. The inspiration is real, but out of reach ; the truth is there, but it is veiled ; the oracle speaks, but in a half-known tongue. Hence to translate the sacred words, to unveil the truth, to draw forth the inspired announcements into practical use, an infallible interpreter is needed ; and such an interpreter, we are assured, God has provided in the inspired Bishop or hierarchy of Rome. Without their aid, as secondary guides, the Bible itself would be without its use,—its voice a source of discord, its truth an unapproachable reality ; they give definiteness to its instructions, completeness to its defective parts, and make the final choice from its ambiguities. According to this theory of two inspirations, it is obvious that it is only a *virtual and unavailable infallibility* of which the Scriptures are the seat, the *actual and serviceable infallibility* is in the priesthood. It is to them, in fact, that the final appeal is made ; for their decision that authority is claimed ; to their decree that submission is enforced. Whoever disobeys the

authority of the church, rejects the voice of God, and forfeits his hope of heaven.

Now the Protestant withdraws this infallibility from the priesthood and the church, and totally destroys it; he denies the existence of any such prerogative in any living man or men of Christendom. With him, therefore, the whole infallibility reverts to the Scriptures; all inspiration, all authority, is concentrated there. About the Catholic offence of disregard to the authority of the church, he knows nothing. With him it is replaced by another, *rejection of the sense of Scripture*. Whoever does this, offends not merely against sound reason, but against the word of God; he resists his Maker; he disowns the tribunal of his judge; he repudiates the essentials of faith, and is lost for ever. Here, then, we reach the two ideas of heresy, which belong respectively to the rival systems. The Catholic's heretic is a man who rejects the authority of the church; the Protestant's heretic is a man who rejects the sense of scripture. Proceeding upon this definition, we are encountered by two important questions: who, practically, are the heretics in the two cases; and how are they likely to be treated by their respective churches.

1. Who are the heretics? How is the definition of the offence to be applied to the detection of the offender?

In the Catholic communion, there can be no difficulty. To deny the authority of the church is a definite and intelligible act; for the church means the pope and the priests; and they are men, with a will of their own, which can be collected and expressed; they are living judges of the acts and ideas which do, or do not, accord with that will. By the very meaning of the terms, it appears that every man must be veritably a heretic whom those persons feel and pronounce to be such. But with Protestants the case is different. Their heretic is he who rejects the sense, not of the priests, but of the scriptures: and the Bible cannot speak for itself, and tell us who the offender is; it cannot go to him and say, Thou art

the man. I ask then again (and I put the question to the orthodox Protestant), how are we to find out the unhappy delinquent? Where is the sense of scripture against which it is so terrible to rebel? There are *the words*, but that is not what you mean; they are accepted by the heretic, no less than by yourself, and are only the material symbols of the meaning,—which must have its seat in some mind. The sense of a book then must be, either the ideas of the *writer*, or those of the *reader*,—either those which suggested the words, or those which the words suggest. To get at the former, when the author is gone, is clearly impossible; the thoughts of John, and Peter, and Paul, at the moments when they wrote their works, are beyond our reach. The sense of scripture then denotes your sense; the notions which it awakens in your mind. The denier of the word of God is the reader, to whom the Bible suggests ideas different from yours. The oppugner of divine authority is the recusant of your interpretation; the rejecter of infallible certainty is the disputer of your constructions; the unbeliever in the essentials is the questioner of your favourite conclusions. In short, God has made the salvation of all men depend on their seeing your notions in the Bible. Who now can deny that the infallibility which the Roman Catholic gives to the Pope and the church, the Protestant takes home to his own individual mind?

The real state of the case then may be comprised in a few words. In the process of divine instruction there are three distinct steps; 1st. there are certain ideas in the mind of Christ; 2nd. there are certain words used to embody those ideas; 3rd. this form of speech is so imperfect a vehicle of thought, that in six different persons it excites six different senses. The real seat of unerring truth is in the original conceptions of Christ's understanding; the infallibility which resides there alone, the Protestant transfers to his own particular favourite among the six senses; he assumes it as an absolute fact, not merely that the ideas of Christ were true, but that his own are identical with Christ's.



He evidently imagines, that he has possession of some certainty more than human, something much more secure than a probable opinion. He comes to me with the air, not of a man who desires to recommend a rational conviction, but of one who is charged with a message of inspiration. He calls himself an ambassador of heaven, and speaks as if he were ; he assures me that I am in the bondage of iniquity, and treats me as if I were. He tells me that he approaches me in the spirit of a divine love,—which he proves by showing me no human respect. He brings me his own peculiar notions which he denominates “ the truth of God, that cannot lie ;” he proposes to eradicate mine, which he entitles “ delusions of Satan.” His are the breathings of the Holy Spirit, mine the offspring of a carnal understanding. Instead of reasoning with me, he prays for me ; feeling, I suppose, that he has greater influence on the mind of God, than on that of man. He avoids the usual means of persuasion, and, passing by my understanding, goes direct to my will, wielding not arguments but motives, not evidence but fears, telling me not of proofs but of perils, not of reasons but of ruin ; and aiming to throw, not my judgment into a calm, but my feelings into a tempest. Now I ask, whether this is the spirit in which one erring man would address another ; whether it is the manly and respectful appeal of equal to equal ; and not rather the dictation of a superior, the oracle of a divine missionary, the utterance of conscious infallibility ? Has this man the least idea, that he has any thing to learn in religion, as one human mind may learn from another ? Is his the air of one who seeks truth, or of one who enlightens ignorance ? If his interpretations were actually the gifts of direct and exclusive inspiration, could he possibly ascribe to them a more absolute certainty ? And could he endure that I should retort upon him the very language which he applies to me, and call his creed a soul-destroying heresy, a growth from the hardness of his heart, a snare of hell, the dictate of a proud and corrupt nature ?

Would he not feel this language to be an intolerable insult, turn away in an agony of horror, and never offer me again his contemptuous compassion? Nay, more, would he not call this calumny on his notions a blasphemy against heaven, and pronounce the contumely of his opinions, a wilful rebellion against inspiration? Does he not then identify his private mind with the unerring intellect of God, and clothe himself with the attributes of infallibility.<sup>1</sup>

After all, in the midst of this acrimony, and notwithstanding the dreadful intervals, the appalling contrasts, said to exist between the different creeds, these Christians look so surprisingly like one another! All professing to follow the same guide, and for the most part thinking well of the same actions, and deriving from their faith very much the same comfort; it is astonishing to think of the difference hereafter, among a people that have so strong a resemblance here! When I see one of them rising up before his companions, and telling them, that what he perceives in scripture is the only certain truth, that they are wasting their reverence upon phantasms of their own reason, that they do not discern the same saving faith, or even worship the same God, with himself, I am impelled to think of the following incident. It is a parable of orthodoxy, which perhaps will render my meaning clear.

During a night of interrupted and cloudy moonlight, a company of travellers are journeying over an open plain, towards a city of refuge, which all desire to reach. The plain is wide, and the tracks across it difficult to find; and during some moments of darkness the way seems to be lost, and all further advance to be impossible. The moon, however, breaks partially forth from behind a cloud, and reveals at some distance an elevated object, which promises help to the bewildered pilgrims. They all agree that it is intended as a guide to the wayfarer, and that it is as well to make use of it for that end. This, one would think, should be enough to send them cheerily on their road again; nor could one imagine, that the kind

office of this visible object as a guide can have any particular dependence on its shape. The travellers, however, think otherwise; and as the thing is imperfectly seen by that misty light, they fall into vehement disputes about its form. Every one is perplexing himself about what it is, though they are all agreed *what it is for*. One pronounces it an obelisk; another takes it for a sign-post; a third is confident that it is a tree. The man who declares it to be an obelisk becomes eager and vociferous; he is persuaded, that the ruler of the country would never set up a delusion to guide the wanderer; what he sees before him must then be a real thing; and what he sees is an obelisk; without doubt, therefore, the obelisk is the real thing. That his companions fail to acknowledge this, is owing to their uncommon confidence in their eyesight; they exalt their own impressions above the reality; they attend to the phantasies of their own sensorium, instead of abandoning themselves to the light that is reflected from the object. If they will but try to see the obelisk, instead of retaining so obstinate a preference for a sign-post or a tree, they will find nothing clearer. He warns them to beware of their alarming condition; for a man that sees phantasms, and mistakes his own conceptions for realities, what is he but a madman, or the subject of some dreadful malady? In fact, it is evident, that the true light is intercepted by their own wilful fancies, and, intently as they seem to be looking, not a ray from the real object reaches them.\* And when they arrive at the city of refuge, they will find themselves shut out; it is no place for those who see shapes in their own thoughts; and however truly their course may have been steered, and however noble the offering they bring, the city opens its gates to none but those that see the obelisk.<sup>2</sup>

\* "The Socinian and Trinitarian, notwithstanding their verbal agreement, having a *different object of worship*, and a different ground of confidence, must be allowed to be of different religions."—"Robert Hall's Review of Zeal without Innovation," p. 94.

Behold here a mirror of orthodoxy ; and an exposition of the Protestant's notion of a heretic. Every one receives this opprobrious name and all its catalogue of annoyances, who rejects any body's sense of scripture. Every Protestant who produces a creed, as containing ideas necessary to acceptance with God, thereby claims infallibility. He may talk, to save appearances, of the infallibility of the Bible ; but he means, as we have seen, his own. Every such creed is virtually a Papal manifesto ; nor does any thing protect us from a miserable subjection to spiritual despotism, except the multitude of rival claimants on inspired authority. We live amid a competition of infallibilities, which prevents any one from making successful head against the rest. In the Roman Catholic church there is a priesthood that commands, and a laity that submits : the authority claimed on the one hand is recognised on the other. But among Protestants there is no subject class : there is pretension everywhere, submission nowhere ; and hence, instead of the apparent unity and real apathy of the ancient faith, we have the busy race of zealots, the contentions of sects, the passions of party, in which, whatever may be the triumphs of faith, the peaceful pursuer of truth is thrust aside and lost.

2. Having answered our first question, "Who are the heretics?" let us proceed to the second : "How are they likely to be treated by the churches against which they respectively offend?"

The answer is short and plain : both Catholic and Protestant churches will persecute their heretics *till they find out that persecution is of no use*. By persecution, I mean the employment of any pains or penalties, the administration of any uneasiness to body or mind, in consequence of a man's belief, or with a view to change it. Its essential feature is this ; that it addresses itself to the will, not to the understanding ; it seeks to modify opinion by the use of fears, instead of reasons—of motives, instead of arguments. The

feelings which lead to persecution are very various. It has its origin in the irritation and resentment natural to ignorant and vulgar minds when their opinions are disputed, and harassing doubts suggested to them. This anger is often supported, as well as diffused, by the contagion of sympathy, which leads men who feel their favourite sentiments in danger to herd together, and work up a collective enthusiasm, which, in the single individuals, would be speedily borne away by the increasing inroads of reason. These fanatics, secretly conscious that their own faith is artificially, and not rationally, sustained, attribute the same *wilfulness* to others, and aim to *run down* the opinions of opponents, as they have *run up* their own. And even when the discovery is made, that persecution, offering no evidence to the intellect, cannot operate on the offender's belief, and makes hypocrites instead of converts, it is still kept up as a warning to observers to hold themselves aloof from the hated sentiments, and remove from all chances of being convinced. Every man who has any interest, either personal or fanatical, in the suppression of particular opinions—every one, that is, who imagines that he will himself be injured in this life, or that his fellow-men will be injured in another, by the diffusion of those opinions—is naturally, and almost necessarily, a persecutor.

Now of the *personal* inducement to persecution, I say nothing. It exists wherever there is an incorporated clergy, whose church embodies a creed in its constitution. The *fanatical* inducement is found in full strength, wherever the salvation of human beings is held to be dependent on their belief. Where eternity is at stake, and the question is to be decided between heaven and hell, there must be no refined economy of men's happiness ; to be over tender to them here, is to sacrifice them hereafter : no pain must be spared, no scrupulosity indulged, no complaint regarded : it is all trifling, compared with the dreadful future ; souls are not to be ruined out of good nature ; and, at all hazards, the heresy must be

stopped. The only question is, how much suffering will be most conducive to the end ; for there is no occasion to inflict wanton and gratuitous misery. The whole amount of pain which will tend to arrest the progress of obnoxious tenets, always has been, and always will be, created by those who imagine their consequences to be fatal hereafter. The punishment of death for heresy was not abandoned till it was found that it defeated its own end, and excited sympathy for those whom it was designed to point out to execration. The tendency to sympathize with suffering increasing with the advance of civilization, milder pains are now resorted to. But still the rule is the same ; give as much suffering as will help to put down the disagreeable sect.

Now, as the idea of the dependence of salvation on belief belongs to the orthodox Protestant churches no less than to the Roman Catholic, we should expect, if the foregoing remarks are true, to find the spirit of persecution pervading both systems equally. And I affirm that we do, and appeal with confidence to history in proof. The only differences are the two following: the Roman Catholic church has passed through a darker and more ferocious period of society than its rival ; and through the greater part of its existence it has been without competitor ; so that its cruelties have been more revolting in kind, and less checked by the fear of enemies. But in modern times, and in countries of equal civilization, the two religions have no distinction of merit in this respect. The Reformation, and all the churches it created, are full of the history of persecutions, which for cold-blooded atrocity were never surpassed. I ask in vain for more than a single name among the first Reformers, whose reputation is free from the disgrace of confounding heresy and crime. Socinus defended the use of force in the suppression of error ; Luther employed it ; Calvin, Beza, and Melancthon dealt relentlessly in the persuasion of the prison and the stake.<sup>3</sup> Their hands were dipped in blood ; when we praise them, fetters clank in the ear

of memory, and interrupt us. But I forbear ; there is a tribunal above to which they have all been summoned ; Luther has already answered there for the banishment of Muncer ; Calvin has told to the unerring confessional of the Universal Father the tale of the tortured and murdered Servetus ; and I therefore close my accusation against their Protestant infallibility by quoting the noble rebuke which it received from one contemporary pen, that was never dipped in gall, or sold to Mammon, or tipped with fire. There was a reformer in Hungary of the name of Dudith. He recoiled from the horrors of his companions in the Reformation, and dared to expostulate with Beza, of Geneva, in these bold terms : “ You contend,” he says, “ that scripture is a perfect rule of faith and practice. But you are all divided about the sense of scripture, and you have not settled who shall be judge. You say one thing, Stancarus another. You quote scripture, he quotes scripture. You reason, he reasons. You require me to believe you. I respect you : but why should I trust you rather than Stancarus ? You say he is a heretic ; but the Papists say you are both heretics. Shall I believe them ? They quote historians and fathers, so do you. To whom do you all address yourselves ? Where is the judge ? You say the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets : but you say I am no prophet ; and I say you are not one. Who is to be judge ? I love liberty as well as you. You have broken off your yoke ; allow me to break mine. Having freed yourselves from the tyranny of Popish prelates, why do you turn ecclesiastical tyrants yourselves, and treat others with barbarity and cruelty for only doing what you set them an example to do ? You contend that your lay hearers, the magistrates, and not you, are to be blamed ; for it is they who banish and burn for heresy. I know you make this excuse : but tell me, have not you instilled such principles into their ears ? Have they done anything more than put in practice the doctrine that you taught them ? Have you not told them how glorious it was to defend the

faith? Have you not been the constant panegyrist of such princes as have depopulated whole districts for heresy? Do you not daily teach, that they who appeal from your confessions to scripture ought to be punished by the secular power? It is impossible for you to deny this. Does not all the world know that you are a set of demagogues, or (to speak more mildly) a sort of tribunes, and that the magistrates do nothing but exhibit in public what you teach in private? You try to justify the banishment of Ochin, and the execution of others, and you seem to wish Poland would follow your example. God forbid! When you talk of your Augsburg confession and your Helvetic creed, and your unanimity, and your fundamental truths, I keep thinking of the sixth commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’”

Blessings on the memory of this good foreigner! May God make his spirit less foreign to our churches!\*

\* In a letter to Wolff, he says, “Tell me, my learned friend, now that the Calvinists have burnt Servetus, and beheaded Gentilis, and murdered many others, and banished Bernard Ochin, with his wife and children, from your city in the depth of a sharp winter; now that the Lutherans have expelled Lasco, with the congregation of foreigners that came out of England with him, in an extremely rigorous season of the year; having done a great many such exploits, all contrary to the genius of Christianity, how, I ask, how shall we meet the Papists? With what face can we tax them with cruelty? How dare we say ‘our weapons are not carnal?’ How can we any longer urge, ‘Let both grow together till the harvest?’ Let us cease to boast that faith cannot be compelled, and that conscience ought to be free.”—Socini Opera, tom I., quoted in Robinson’s “Ecclesiastical Researches,” pp. 592, 593.



## LECTURE IV.

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### RATIONALISM.

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#### I CORINTHIANS, XIV. 20.

BRETHREN, BE NOT CHILDREN IN UNDERSTANDING ; HOWBEIT IN MALICE  
BE YE CHILDREN, BUT IN UNDERSTANDING BE MEN.

IF we were asked to describe the kind of revelation we should expect from the Infinite Creator to the human mind, we should have little difficulty in stating at least the faculties and sentiments of our nature, which it would be most likely to stimulate. It would restrain the merely animal tendencies, which subserve the purposes of physical existence, and from whose disordered ascendancy the saddest evils and most complete degradation of humanity arise. It would appeal sparingly to fear ; for this is the coarse argument of mere power, which, if it produces submission, excites alienation, and is ill suited to the purposes of One who would win created minds to sympathy with himself, who holds in his hands unlimited means of touching the springs of better affection, and capturing all souls by the power of veneration. It would indulge that yearning after exhibitions of power more than human, which, in the absence of the reality, has given birth to fiction, and taken refuge, for want of better shelter, in the marvels of mythology and romance. It would pay respect to that melancholy feeling of moral imperfection which all noble minds

carry from the world to the converse of their own thoughts, and would prove how true has been their dark and instinctive feeling after a purer and greater virtue. It would show that the consciousness of mighty but undeveloped elements, of sublime though latent affections, in human nature was no delusion; that a mind lifted above the arts of selfishness, penetrated with a wise and generous love, possessing a profound unison of will with God, and while invested with the majesty of faith, not losing the meekness of mercy, is not merely a possibility, but a reality. It would not be silent to those human affections which, since the fathers fell asleep, have been plaintiffs against death, and stood on the brink of the invisible, crying in vain over its abyss for tidings of the treasures it conceals. Yet, in its answer to those eager inquiries, it would still leave scope for that imaginative faculty, whose office it is to people the unknown, and shadow forth the future, and urge on our progress by conceptions of better life. And it would invite the understanding of man to all topics which are great and inspiring; encouraging him to examine what it most befitted him to learn, and to reason on that of which it was needful that he should be convinced; aiding him to solve the mighty problems of life, and unfold the ideas of duty, and pierce the penetralia of his nature, and aspire for ever to worthier conceptions of the Infinite Mind. It would ask for the devotion of a free and fearless mind, whose faculties moved in the liberty of love, and whose only act of self-sacrifice consisted in turning out the whole intellect upon the field of nature and of history, to seek whatever God has made true and good. It would never aim at suspending speculation on any subject, except by superseding it—by exhausting discoveries upon it—by satiating curiosity—by presenting, as he who is Lord of the mind well may, such overpowering evidence, such clear illumination, as will set to rest the anxieties, and command the willing conviction, not of this or that small section of mankind, but of all whom it may concern.

Unsatisfied curiosity is itself a proof of defective information ; the mere desire for knowledge indicates the capacity to receive it ; and the eagerness to inquire constitutes a perfect title to research.

If we are to trust to the popular description of the gospel, Christianity is almost the complete reverse of this picture of a revelation, and disappoints all these expectations. It invades every faculty of the human mind, and watches it with an inquisitor's eye. It suppresses the sentiment of duty, by representing us as incapable of putting it into action. It confounds the understanding and the will, and brandishes terrors, which address themselves to the latter, in the face of belief, which flows from the former. It forbids speculation upon everything, and gives the knowledge which supersedes it upon nothing. For, while no churches give the same report of its essential doctrines, they all agree that those doctrines must be kept safe from the approaches of reason. Its only acceptable worship is, not a free and progressive mind, open to new light and loving it, bending before what it knows not in holy listening for fresh revelations, but a mind with an old creed engraved upon it. We are therefore left in this condition : the subjects into which, before the rise of Christianity, the understandings of reflecting men used to inquire are still perfectly unsettled, and represented in as many different ways as there are churches in Christendom ; and yet philosophy is put out, and may no longer concern itself with the character of God, the administration of Providence, the duty of man, and the hopes of immortality.

Let us attempt to rescue the Gospel from the imputation of this effect, and ascertain whether it does not accord with our first conceptions of what a revelation is likely to be ; whether it is not a system of perfect rationalism, and does not encourage the unreserved application of our understandings to its records, and their various contents of history, miracle, and doctrine.

When the scriptures are placed in our hands we have two operations to perform on them ; first, to draw forth their meaning, *i. e.*, to reach the original ideas of the authors ; secondly, having obtained those ideas, as nearly as we can, to yield to them the right treatment, and determine whether we are to look for additional evidence of their truth, or to receive them without further demur. I propose to explain what should be the proper conduct of the understanding in both these processes,—with respect, first to the interpretation of the Bible, then to the admission of its statements.

1. There is a prevailing notion, that in the process of interpretation there is very little for the understanding to do. The scriptures we are everywhere told, are so plain, that he who runs may read, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein. And yet, the wayfaring man, if a Catholic, has, we are incessantly assured, fatally erred therein. So has he, if an Arminian ; so has he, if an Antinomian ; so has he, if a Sabellian ; so has he, if a Unitarian. Each of these has his separate theory of Christianity, which is so exceedingly obvious, that none but the blind can miss it ; yet each does miss all but his own.—Whence comes this diversity of interpretation, if the Bible be so easy to understand ? Do you say, it is all from the diversity of men's understandings ? It is not the difficulty of the book, but their mode of regarding it, that is in fault ? That is to say, if they were in your state of mind, they would find your discoveries in the scriptures ;—if they looked through your eyes, they would have no difficulty in seeing what you see. No doubt ; and it is possibly to this that the declamation respecting the plainness of the sacred writings reduces itself ; that they readily suggest to every one the notions which he is already persuaded are to be found there ; and excite most forcibly in his mind the ideas of which his mind is already full. For what do we mean, when we say that any document is easily understood ?—*that it sug-*

*gests with great certainty the original ideas of the writer.* Amid the uncertainty of theological interpretation, with what justice can we apply the description to the Bible? \*

Surely, then, it is time to turn to a different view, and whatever may be our wishes, to look the truth stedfastly in the face,—that the scriptures are a collection of writings *singularly difficult to understand*; whose true meaning has proved far more inaccessible than that of any other ancient work, and which requires still the further elucidation of history, and strenuous exercise of judgment, to increase our knowledge of its sense. Till we fairly realize this feeling, we shall make no advance towards any better familiarity with the Christian records. There is not a more fatal obstacle to the improvement of our views of revelation than this maxim, that the Bible is as plain as noon-day. Be assured, it is often the advice by which the partisan attempts to lull your reason to sleep, and make you indolently receive whatever he may communicate; it is the frequent prelude to something peculiarly absurd, which he knows you will resist, unless you are thrown off your guard. When, therefore, he tells you, that “nothing can be clearer,” prepare yourself for what is specially obscure; when he insists that “there is nothing more certain,” look for what is singularly doubtful; when he announces “a positive essential,” expect a contradiction.

Before passing on to notice the office of reason in the interpretation of revelation, a few words may be necessary to overcome the reluctance which many may feel in admitting that the scriptures are so hard to comprehend. The statement itself indeed seems hardly capable of denial; it is not an assertion; it is not an opinion; it is a *fact*. In the minds of the sacred

\* “Open your Bibles, take the first page that occurs in either Testament, and tell me, without disguise, is there nothing in it too hard for your understanding? If you find all before you clear and easy, you may thank God for giving you a privilege which he has denied to so many thousands of sincere believers.”—“*Discourses*,” by Dr. T. Balguy.

authors, there was but *one* meaning, when they wrote ; in the minds of their disciples, in all ages, there have been many sets of ideas, when they read ; and let the true interpretation be where it may, it is but a very limited portion of the Christian world that is united in its reception. If the essential ideas of Christianity lay in any of these disputed interpretations, if it was designed to impart, as truth, any one of those notions which still exist as controverted opinions, this confession would be fatal to the evidence of the Gospel ; it would prove that the institution had failed in its primary intent, had kept in darkness that which it proposed to bring to light, had misunderstood the minds it was addressing, and consigned its truth to a vehicle not fitted to convey it ; and, therefore, that it could not possibly be divine. So that whoever represents any peculiarity of his own or his church's creed as an essential part of the Gospel, thereby subverts the Gospel itself as a divine institution ; *he cannot be right, unless Christianity be false*. But the essence of the system may be sought elsewhere ; in those ideas which, from having been never disputed, have been little noticed ; in the historical and spiritual, not the doctrinal, portion of the scriptures ; in the character, and miracles, and resurrection of Christ ; and the thoughts and feelings which they have awakened in all ages and churches. If this be so, vast portions of the Christian writings may be almost irremediably obscure ; and yet Christianity itself have wound its unobstructed way through the quiet recesses of history,—a lucid and fertilizing stream of thought.

The office of the understanding in the interpretation of the scriptures is, to abandon itself freely to the impression which they produce. That the impression may have the greatest chance of being correct, two conditions are needful ; that the mind be charged with ancient knowledge, and emptied of modern theories. We must become penetrated with the sentiments of the age of Christ ; feel the impatient expectation of

those who were looking for the consolation of Israel ; burn with hope at every new rumour of the Deliverer, and despond again as the rumour dies away. We must go forth to labour in the fields of Galilee, and overhear the peasants talk of the new prophet of Nazareth : how some are elated by the thought that their despised district had, perhaps, given birth to the Messiah, while others plead against this meek claimant the splendour of the royal race of Judah ; and provincial vanity gives way to national ambition. We must tremble with the superstition that turned madness into an incarnate fiend, and treated the diseases of this upper world as stray terrors escaped from the invisible abyss. We must mingle with the caravan of pilgrims to the holy city that winds its way from the heights above Capernaum, and bears through the plains below, and to Jerusalem, the first tidings of the deeds of Christ. The localities, the passions, the controversies, the forms of social life in that city of priests must be familiar to us as household memories. The ravine of Kedron, and the Mount of Olivet, must be like an evening walk, and the shady rills of Siloam like a noon-day rest ; the “ Beautiful Gate ” must be too familiar to dazzle us with its golden reflection of the dawn ; the levelled rock of Moriah our feet must daily climb, and pace the cloister of Solomon in frequent meditation ; and before our eyes the cloud of the morning offering must curl and kindle in the sun, and the veil of the temple wave, as if from a breath within the Holy of Holies. We must share the party feelings of the times ; and listen to Jesus with eagerness to learn whether he favours the intellectual conceit of the Sadducee, or the sanctimonious ambition of the Pharisee, and see them both retire abashed from his prompt dignity, or crouch before the rending invective by which he tare open the “ whited sepulchres.” With Paul flying in rage from Jerusalem, and arriving humbled and blind at Damascus, and for three days beholding nothing but the vision that had struck him to the earth, his conflict of

emotions must become ours. Watching him at his work as a tent-maker at Corinth, or hearing him in the school-room at Ephesus, or restraining him from rushing into the theatre in that city of Diana, that he might confront the craftsmen of superstition assembled there ; wrecked with him on the rocks of Malta, or in audience before the Emperor at Rome ; we must adopt his experience, encounter his dangers, study with him the varieties of character and the attitudes of society, and lose the sympathies of the present in the vivid creations of the past. Nor is the assumption of these foreign sentiments more difficult than the complete deposition of our own ; and yet it is only in proportion as the mind is disrobed of all preconceived notions, that it enjoys the possibility of receiving a correct impression from the records of Christianity. It signifies not what those notions may be. The Calvinist goes to the scriptures with his thoughts full of a scholastic creed, and he discovers in them a scheme like the philosophy of the middle ages. The Unitarian takes with him the persuasion that nothing can be scriptural which is not rational and universal, and he finds a preceptive system, in which local and circumstantial beauties are frittered into cold ethical generalities, and a doctrinal theory, in which burning orientalisms are turned into pale and sickly truisms. The German Anti-supernaturalist sets out with the prejudice that a miracle is a thing incredible ; and he tortures the narrative to reduce its events to the level of every-day life, and refines away every trace of a divine origin from the Gospel ; turning it, in fact, into a piece of ordinary biography, distinguished for nothing but the excellence of the character which it describes, and the extraordinary effects which it has produced in the world. All these are illustrations of the evils arising from forming our own notions of Christianity first, and proceeding to the interpretation of its records afterwards. There must be no reservation or restriction in the openness of our mind to the impressions of



the work we study ; there must be no tacit exclusion of certain meanings as impossible ; the Calvinist must not turn away from any system of ideas because it is heterodox, nor the Unitarian from any because it is not rational. The sole task of the interpreter is to reach the meaning of the author.

If, then, this be all that is meant, when we are exhorted to prostrate our reason before scripture ; if this high-sounding phrase simply intimates that we are not to take our speculations to the New Testament, and then palm them upon the sacred writers, the principle is both true and important. But the rule is not confined in its application to this one book ; it is the fundamental canon of *all* interpretation. We must, in like manner, *prostrate our reason* before Xenophon, and Cicero, and Shakspeare, and Voltaire, and every other writer ; for if we torture their language so as to make it speak our prejudices, we violate our duty as expounders. The respect which we pay to the Bible is, in this view, precisely that which is due to every other collection of writings, simply to give it the best chance of speaking for itself.

Now it is perfectly true that many of the vagaries of theological belief have arisen from the neglect of this rule,—from the determination of men to find their own fancies in the scriptures. But to exclaim in consequence, “ See the effect of *applying reason* to the illustration of scripture, is to bestow upon these aberrations a dignity which they ill deserve.” It is precisely because the method which leads to them is *perfectly irrational*, an absurd mistake of the whole business of an interpreter, a means that infallibly leads you directly away from the end, that it is to be repudiated ; in order to penetrate to the sense of an author, you make up your mind that he shall mean whatever you please. But the application of the word *reason* to this system is far less astonishing than the remedy which frightened orthodoxy is

constantly proposing for it ; it is to be cured by what is called (with great simplicity) "*the leading power* of articles which guide men's faith."\* In order, that is, to prevent men seeing their own ideas in scripture, they must be *led* to see Luther's or Cranmer's ; in order to open their minds to the teachings of Christ, indoctrinate them assiduously with Calvin ! That Paul may find their thoughts unbiassed, school them well with Melancthon first ! That the complaint of torturing scripture into accordance with previous prejudices should proceed from University pulpits, and be uttered by men who are actually bound hand and foot to the service of a creed, who sign articles first, and study the Bible afterwards, is a temerity which would be amusing if it were not melancholy. It is not then that there is any objection to twisting scripture to suit human hypotheses ; it is only that every man must not be allowed to fit it to his own ; for then the thing becomes too palpable ; and in the multitude of individual Christianities, the prevailing absence of truth and call for further researches are obvious. But great advantage arises when a whole church or nation takes up some one man's reason instead of their own (as the English Episcopalians have selected Cranmer's), and agrees to see it everywhere in the Bible ; for by this device the hollowness of the system is plausibly covered over, a respectable uniformity is produced, which looks something like the singleness of truth, and an imposing array of suffrages is ready to scare away all solitary intrepidity of research. Whether truth advances or not, at all events appearances are kept up, and trouble is avoided.

The business, then, of the understanding in the interpretation of scripture, is the same as in the case of any other book, to furnish itself well with all such knowledge of language, of

\* The phrase will be found in p. 12 of Rev. Hugh James Rose's "State of the Protestant Religion in Germany, in a Series of Discourses preached before the University of Cambridge."

history, of localities, of the sentiments of the age and nation, as may have any bearing upon the writings ; and then to give itself freely up to the impression which they convey, without any attempt to modify it by any notions, whether derived from an ecclesiastical creed or an individual theory, previously in the mind. But the more important question remains. Suppose that we have fixed on our own interpretation ; that we have reached, as far as we can ascertain, the original ideas of the sacred authors ; *how are we to treat them ?* You will say, perhaps, that will depend on the view which you take of the writers' mission and authority. If, as the first Lecture attempted to show, they were *upright and able witnesses of Christ*, but not exempt from the possibility of error, their notions cannot be received as oracles, but must be judged of by their intrinsic evidence and merits. But if you are satisfied that they were inspired men, you must receive their announcements as authoritative ; they possess the highest proof, and are recommended by the attestation of God. You have no further occasion, no longer any right, to sift their evidence, or ask for natural indications of their truth. Whatever may be the light in which they would appear to your uncorrected understanding, whatever their seeming improbability, or even absurdity, you may not hesitate ; reasoning is set aside, its impression must be swept away by the overpowering reverence for revelation. With the internal character of the communication you have no further concern, when its external vehicle is inspiration. Its impossibility, its seeming contradiction to known truths can, at best, be but an inference of your own intellect, whose erring perceptions you are not, for a moment, to put into competition with the infallibility of God. When a human judgment is at variance with a divine certainty, there is no doubt which must give way.

This argument has been almost universally held to be satisfactory. Its force has been admitted by Unitarian, no less than by orthodox Christians : and, in accordance with it, the

former have repeatedly said, if we could find the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement, and everlasting torments in the scriptures, we should believe them ; we reject them, not because we deem them unreasonable, but because we perceive them to be unscriptural.<sup>1</sup> For my own part, I confess myself unable to adopt this language. Not that I entertain any hesitation in pronouncing these notions, in the form in which they now exist, to be unscriptural, or doubt the importance of relieving the Christian records of all responsibility for them. But I am prepared to maintain, that if they were in the Bible, they would still be incredible ; that the intrinsic evidence against a doctrine may be such as to baffle all the powers of external proof ; and that, in every case, the natural improbability of a tenet is not to be set aside as a forbidden topic, but to be weighed as an essential part of the evidence which must determine its acceptance or rejection. And in order to sustain this position, it is not necessary to interfere with the question of inspiration. Let the case be put in this form. Suppose the strongest conceivable probability to have been established that a man is inspired ; suppose that, with this probability in your mind, you discover in his writings what appears to you absurd. The question is this ; are you to receive the absurdity, because it is an inspiration ; or to discard the inspiration, because it is an absurdity. The question is intricate : but I will endeavour to make it clear, that no apparent inspiration whatever can establish anything contrary to reason ; that reason is the ultimate appeal, the supreme tribunal, to the test of which even scripture must be brought.<sup>2</sup>

The whole force of the argument on which I am about to animadvert depends on this ; that the truth of the doctrine is guaranteed by inspiration ; its falsehood is guaranteed by reason only ; and, it is urged, in proportion as the Divine Mind is more unerring than the human, must our assent to its truth overpower the perception of its absurdity.—Nor

could any fault be found with this conclusion, if the inspiration could be assumed as a starting point, entirely beyond the reach of doubt, as a fixed certainty, lifted above the region of evidence. If the existence of the inspiration be a thing absolutely self-evident, all the statements which it recommends possess the force of axioms ; if it be probable, it imparts a similar probability to them ; if it be doubtful, they must be questionable in the same degree. The whole security of the communication is hung on the infallibility of their authority ; their safety must be measured by *its* stability. The inspiration indeed vouches for the doctrine ; but what is to vouch for the inspiration ?

Now no one will be found to maintain, that the inspiration of those who speak to us in the scriptures is a self-evident and axiomatic certainty. It requires to be supported by some arguments, and recommended by proofs ; and it is worthy of reliance, in proportion to the validity of those proofs. In short, it is a moral probability, the strength of which depends upon the evidence which can be adduced in its favour. Let this evidence exist in the greatest conceivable amount : suppose that a voice is heard beneath a serene sky, and understood, by a multitude of witnesses, to be a voice not human, pronouncing the unlimited infallibility of some one present : and suppose further, that one of the bystanders reports to us the circumstances of this miraculous scene. It is obvious that everything is now thrown upon his testimony ; on this rests the *supernatural fact* which supports the *inspiration* adduced as the foundation of the *doctrine*. Respecting the circumstances which are essential to the credibility of this testimony, there is little need to speak at length. Every one would intuitively ask the requisite questions, before he yielded his assent to the account of an event so extraordinary. Is the reporter a man of sound observation, and habitually correct perception ? Has his general integrity been so tried as to be above suspicion ? and was he, in this particular

instance, in a position which presented no strong motive to deceit? Let all these inquiries be satisfactorily answered : and the competency and veracity of the witness may be accepted, as very probable indications that the testimony before us is true.

It is possible, however, that, from living in a different age, we may be beyond the reach of oral attestation. And in the place of it, a document may be put into our hands, purporting to be the production of the original observer, and to have faithfully transmitted his report. In this case a new task is laid upon us. All the proofs which had been collected from his history, that he was an able and honest man, will be of no service, till we have ascertained that the writing before us is really *his* ; that we are actually reading *his* testimony, and not the assertions of some inventor, whose fictions have become, by fraud or accident, associated with his name. In other words, we must examine the reasons for confiding in the authenticity of the work.

A moment's reflection will show that this is no easy task. That the words of the document were written, and the ideas which they express conceived, by *some* human being is clear ; that they proceed from one acquainted with the Greek language may be evident from the character in which they are composed : but out of all the vast successions of men to whom this description applies, to fasten the document even to one particular generation ; from the several nations of that generation to fix it on a single locality ; from the whole population of that locality to trace it to a solitary individual, is a task which apparently threatens to baffle the resources of human ingenuity. Nevertheless, it may be affected so as to yield a high degree of probability. The writing is found to be quoted by an author who lived within four generations of the original reporter ; by another who was separated from him but by three ; by a third a generation higher ; till at length it is chased back to the very confines of its own alleged period. The ascription of it

to the person whose name it bears appears to have been general and public. And if with all this the entire character of the work should remarkably coincide, there ensues a high probability that it veritably contains the testimony which we seek.

If, however, it should appear that the ecclesiastical writings which we have called to our bar to establish this position are themselves forgeries, their evidence becomes worthless, and the correctness of our conclusion is once more thrown into doubt. Hence the authority of these subordinate works presents us still with a further series of investigations, each of which must be conducted like that which I have sketched.

The conclusion, then, to which I would direct your attention is this ; that though the doctrine of the scriptures may rest on the inspiration of those who speak in them,—that inspiration itself rests on a miracle ; that miracle on testimony ; the worth of the testimony on the ability and veracity of the witness ; and its very existence in our hands on the authenticity of a document, which again rests on the genuineness of several others. Each of these steps is but a human probability, ascertained by the exercise of ordinary judgment, and possessing whatever uncertainty results from the natural liability to err. We have a concatenation of reasonings, principally historical, whose last link is this golden one of inspiration, sustaining the doctrine which we are required to embrace. But the gold, however it may adorn, cannot strengthen the structure ; and whatever instability may belong to the historical research at one extremity, belongs equally to the tenet which is found in the other. It is only by hiding in darkness the human portion of the chain, that the careless observer is deluded into the belief, that the alleged truth is linked securely to the throne of God.

This process, then, yields no superhuman certainty with which natural evidence cannot presume to contend ; but simply one process of common inference, which there is no-

thing to prevent some other course of argument from encountering with possible success. A proposition may surely be so absurd, so contradicted by physical and moral evidence around us, so totally at variance with the analogy of nature, that the reasonings by which it is disproved altogether exceed in force those to which inspiration is confided. In fact, it is absurd to treat the proof of inspiration as complete till you have looked into the interior of the doctrines which it teaches; the internal evidence may materially lessen the external, or even sweep away its whole effect. It is useless to reiterate the statement, you are setting up your fallible reason against divine attestation; for the very existence of this attestation is nothing but a deposition given in by human reason. The more you revile the natural understanding, the more do you undermine the proof of inspiration. It is a plain balance of evidence; a judgment respecting the probability of the doctrine, against another judgment respecting the probability of the inspiration.

It is worthy of remark, that this appeal to the character of tenets professing a divine origin is admitted, with the usual theological justice, on the one side of the controversy, while it is denied on the other. When a Christian advocate wishes to prove the divinity of his religion he does not content himself with the external proofs, but proceeds to make reference to the doctrine so worthy of God, the morality so pure and sanctifying, the views of human nature so just and elevated, the hopes of futurity so rational and fitted to our nature, the demeanour of Christ so majestic and yet tender. In this he does perfectly right; and the argument is to my mind decisive. But surely he here assumes, that the human understanding is capable of perceiving the worth and tendency of Christian doctrine, the adaptation to our wants of Christian hopes, the dignity and excellence of Christian virtue. And when an opponent, following the same course, says, here is a notion which is absurd and unreasonable—here a sentiment that tends to evil—here a representation of God which violates the



analogies of nature, with what justice can the Christian turn round and declaim against the weakness and presumption of human reason and the depraved judgments of the human heart?

The conclusions which the foregoing reasoning aims to establish are the following: that it is impossible to attain to any conviction more than rational; that there can exist no obligation, moral or logical, to set aside the suggestions of the understanding in obedience to external authority; that no seeming inspiration can establish anything contrary to reason; that the last appeal, in all researches into religious truth, must be to the judgments of the human mind; that against these judgments scripture cannot have any authority, for upon this authority they themselves decide. The rule is unsound which require us, as soon as we have ascertained the existence of a revelation, to confine ourselves to the office of interpreters, and to yield implicit faith to the ideas, be they what they may, which the record contains. Let us not fall into a snare of words. The existence of a revelation cannot be "*ascertained*," except as a probability; no force of external proof can elevate it into a certainty, and plant it aloft above the action of new evidence. If the rule in question is of any value it goes this length; that the feeblest balance of external probability may overpower the weightiest preponderance of internal improbability. Suppose that a work, professing to contain a revelation, is placed in the hands of an inquirer; that he takes up the investigation of its claims; rises from the task persuaded that it is the authentic production of men who gave evidence of honesty in their lives, and of a divine commission in their miracles; that he is conscious, however, of great deficiencies in some portions of the proof, and great difficulties in others; and that his judgment, after being long poised in uncertainty, finally sways, by a mere atom of evidence, into assent. In this state of mind he acknowledges the existence of the revelation, and is therefore

under an obligation, we are told, to receive, without canvassing, all its contents. Suppose him, then, in interpreting the book, to meet with such statements as these—"that God is a malignant destroyer, who will cause all things to issue in perfect ill; that man is infinitely hateful to his Creator, and to be thrust through the grave into the dungeons of creation; that only the blood and agony of God can quench the fury of Omnipotence, and lay its vengeance into the sleep of satiety;"—is the inquirer to bow before this, and ask no questions? Is a feather of historic evidence to weigh against this solid mass of horrors? Or must he suspect his own first judgment in favour of the revelation, seeing that it is opposed by another set of judgments, respecting the character of God, and the constitution and hopes of man? Talk not of presumptuous confidence in human reason. The inquirer has but this alternative; he must choose on which of two judgments he will rely,—the historical on one side, the moral and philosophical on the other: nor can this choice be made in any other way than by estimating the respective amounts of the conflicting forces. In the place, therefore, of the rule, that having ascertained the existence of revelation, we must believe all its contents, may be substituted another; that the credibility of the contents must be examined before the existence of the revelation can be ascertained. And since the probability that the system is divine depends jointly on the external testimony of the history, and the internal reasonableness of the doctrine, no sentiment can be admitted as revealed, which is opposed by a mass of philosophical evidence exceeding the documentary proofs.

This principle, which vindicates the prerogative of reason to apply itself to the interior, as well as to the exterior, of revelation, is properly described by the word *Rationalism*: and constitutes *the only essential feature* of the system of German Theology which passes under that name. The other chief peculiarity of the Rationalist interpreters,—by which almost exclusively, from its startling character, they are known in this

country,—their anti-supernaturalism, is no necessary part of their system, but an accidental accretion, hastily attached to it in the exaggerating spirit of a new theory. It is an illogical and mischievous application of the principle of rationalism, for which that principle itself refuses to be responsible. That no external testimony can establish a fact or a doctrine intrinsically absurd and incredible is a sound canon of evidence : that a miracle is a thing thus absurd and incredible is a false and rash assumption,—an assumption for which no ingenuity has ever been able to procure the sanction of philosophy. Were it true, Rationalism and Deism would mean the same thing. Were it true, not only would Christianity instantly descend to the level of human institutions, but even the fundamental principles of Theism could no longer be consistently maintained. I do not indeed say, that no attempts should be made to explain the alleged supernatural events of scripture by the operation of natural causes : for every record of a miracle, like every assertion of personal inspiration, really consists of two parts,—a statement of fact, and a statement of opinion,—an account of the witness's sensible impressions, and a reference of those impressions to a direct volition of Deity as their cause. It is to the *first* of these only that his testimony reaches, and for which his veracity is guarantee ; his senses gave him, and their report can give us, no perception of the heavenly antecedent ; the miraculous effect of the occurrence arises, not from the *observed presence* of extraordinary Divine agency, but from the *apparent absence* of any other sufficient cause : it involves therefore a process of inference ; and for us, no less than the original observer, it remains to consider, whether the phenomena are such as to demand a supernatural origin. But should these attempts succeed in reducing the sources of our religion to a series of common influences and events, the Gospel falls : nor is there any intelligible sense in which one,

who thinks that the preternatural may be thus banished from the birth and infancy of our faith, can continue to take the name of Christian.<sup>3</sup> Neither the first principle, then, of the German Rationalists, that reason must judge of the contents as well as the outward structure of revelation; nor their secondary rule, that the resources of natural causation must be exhausted before recourse is had to the preternatural, in the explanation of historical phenomena, can be proved unsound. But they are exposed to just animadversion, for having preferred, by convulsive efforts of interpretation, to compress the memoirs of Christ and his Apostles into the dimensions of ordinary life, rather than admit the operation of miracle on the one hand, or avow their abandonment of Christianity on the other. The signal failure of the school of interpreters who have sought to pare away the miraculous from the New Testament, appears to have finally established this positive result; that it is impossible at once to maintain the veracity of the historians, and to exclude the supernatural from the religion.\*

Already the extravagances to which I have alluded, appear to have almost passed away from the country in which they had their birth: and the true principle of Rationalism, of which they were never legitimate productions, to be taking a more sober direction, and elaborating more useful results. Its spirit has emancipated Germany from the intolerance of Luther, while it has given new life to his law of liberty; and that country, which was the cradle of the Reformation, promises to be the first witness of its maturity. Refusing to dissociate philosophy and Christianity, its genius has seized the glorious conception of a progressive religion, ever in advance of the understanding, and dilating the heart of individual man;—presiding over the civilization, and guardian of

\* On the subject of this paragraph see (in the Appendix), a Letter from the late Rev. J. Blanco White; and compare the remarks in the Preface.

the order, of society. There, if anywhere, will be exhibited that truly sublime state of mind, faith—absolute faith—in truth : and the great problem will be solved, how to combine the freest intellect with the loftiest devotion ;—and while inquiring always, to love and worship still.\*

\* This delineation of the spirit of an ideal church I still allow to stand. The hope of its early realization in Germany, however, it seems impossible longer to entertain.

## LECTURE V.

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### RELATION OF NATURAL RELIGION TO CHRISTIANITY.

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#### ROMANS I. 20.

THE INVISIBLE THINGS OF GOD FROM THE CREATION OF THE WORLD  
ARE CLEARLY SEEN, BEING UNDERSTOOD BY THE THINGS THAT ARE  
MADE, EVEN HIS ETERNAL POWER AND DEITY.

RELIGION is the name of those ideas and feelings which the human being entertains with respect to invisible and superior natures; and consists essentially in the conception of intelligent mind, presiding over the departments of creation to which the worshipper belongs. Among the disclosures which have been the consequence of an extended knowledge of the surface of the globe, those who esteem the faculties and character of man a higher object of study than the rocks and vegetation of the earth, will reckon not the least interesting the discovery that the religious sentiment appears to be universal;—pervading barbarous and cultivated life; the forests of the West, no less than the plains of the East; the unsettled tribes whose history has not the memory of five hundred years, and the venerable nation whose traditions perplex us by their antiquity, whose primitive forms of civilization seem to have become immutable, and whose ideas may be a wreck from the faith of a still youthful world. The only instances in which all notions of superhuman beings have been ascertained to be absent, are the few in which some member of our species has

been cut off from his own kind, and left in the self-dependence of a brute existence ; as if the religious conceptions were the birth of the social emotions, and the feelings of love and fear must train themselves with man before they can take refuge with God, and the faculties of our nature refused to unfold themselves in any but that appointed order, in which self-regard mellowed into the sympathies of kindred and of kind, and the blessed ties of earth draw forth the affections to God. In savage races of men whom our common heart of humanity bleeds to contemplate, whose ferocious passions and wretched condition have obliterated the diviner lineaments of their nature, this is often the redeeming point which brings us back to hope, the solitary exercise of ideal power which persuades us that they have something in common with ourselves ; we see them worship, and know them to be men. The worship may be superstitious and puerile, its creed may be false, its rites may be dark and foul : no matter—this is ignorance : the sentiment is there, ready to attach itself to better ideas ; the feeling of awe, of reverence, which, though it may crouch in terror before a tyrant-spirit now, shall at length, when the understanding is opened to a wider survey of creation, and the heart softened by better emotion, and the moral sense capable of juster estimates, erect itself into a dignified veneration, embodying the conception of perfect excellence in the image of a Paternal God.

Religion, however, has a more extensive sense than when applied to denote our perception of Deity. It includes under it many, and indeed all, subjects of thought which present themselves to our mind in close association with the idea of God. There are certain portions of time, both past and future, there are certain localities, there are certain events, our conceptions of which are held to be a part of our religion ; nor is there any other reason for their being thus singled out from other periods, and places, and transactions, than that they are blended closely with the thought of the Creator. Our

anticipations of immortality are a part of our religion ; because though every portion of the future is equally replete with the energy of the Infinite Will, and every allotment of this world, no less than of the next, is the decree of His providence, and his presence is as actual to-day and to-morrow as in eternity, —our imaginations enthrone him peculiarly in the ages beyond the grave, and think of him as perceptibly presiding over their vicissitudes. Our retrospect of the birth of Christianity is a part of our religion ; not that, in truth, God had any less concern with other portions of the world's history than with that, or planned them with less wisdom, or turned them into realities with less beneficence ; for he was good when he gave men the virtue of Socrates, and the genius of Plato, and the discoveries of Newton, as well as when he inspired the soul and published the miracles of Christ ; but simply because we are more distinctly conscious of the Divine benignity, and more fully realize his positive intention, in the glad tidings of the Gospel, than in the other voices, glad no less could we interpret them, which history sends forth. Our memory of Christ, and conception of his character are part of our religion ;—of ours, who do not regard him as invested with the attributes of Deity, but clothed with the perfection of humanity, and who might therefore be expected to place our connection with him among our social rather than devotional relations, and to render him emotions rather human than holy. But though, in strictness of philosophy, every human being is, in common with Christ, sent forth on a mission by Providence, and placed in his position, and endowed with his qualities of mind and heart, that he may perform his part in the scheme of the Universal Ruler, and help forward the tide of tendencies to its great issues of good ; yet the Divine origin of Christ's office is so singularly conspicuous, his miracles, emblems of power over creation, his character, pure reflection of the spirit of God's administration, so urge us to regard him as the special gift and representative of Deity, that our reverence



passes the limits of social veneration, lifts our hearts to the Parent Mind, and mingles an affectionate sentiment of humanity with our prayers. By a similar association even a part of our geography is transmuted into religion ; and there is a land which we call the Holy Land ; we scarcely think of it as of other regions of the globe, or ascribe to its mountains, and lakes, and rivers, the material reality of Snowdon, and Grassmere, and the Thames ; it is enveloped with a visionary light, and seems to be beyond and above the circuit of this familiar map of earth and waters. Yet it is not that God was there, any more than in Athens or in Rome ; or that his step was on its hills, more than on the unconsecrated heights of Alps or Andes ; or his terror in its whirlwinds, more than in the sweep of the lonely Atlantic ere Columbus had explored its ways ; or his voice in its atmosphere, more than in the breeze which moans in the forests of the new world : but only that our minds can better interpret the vicissitudes of Palestine into acts of God, and feel the appeal to gratitude and devotion in the blessings which have radiated from that spot. Religion, then, is the name for every subject of contemplation which vividly suggests the idea of God. This association makes place and time, and history, memory, and hope, into religion. And if our sentiment of religion be not universal, attached to every thing of which we think, if it singles out peculiarly one train of events, and one class of objects, as its exclusive receptacles, this must be ascribed not to our wisdom, but our ignorance, not to our piety, but our indevoutness, not to our expansion of mind, but its contraction. We see God *some where*, because we are incapable of tracing him *every where*.

*Revealed Religion* comprises the ideas of God derived from the Bible, considered as the record of a supernatural Providence. It is the name for the notions and feelings suggested by a line of Hebrew history, from the patriarchal age to the death of the last Apostle.

*Natural religion* comprises the ideas of God, derived from

every other quarter. It is the name for the notions and feelings suggested by every other thread of history found among the community of nations, or by the evolutions of the material universe ; or by the *objects*, as well as the *events*, of creation, the structures of organized beings, and the mental and moral constitution of man.

The former of these is obviously much the *smaller* of the two sources of religion ; it embraces only one of the innumerable trains of occurrences in the world's history. It is, however, copiously instructive ; for it contains that set of events which God puts forth for the special purposes of instruction,—I mean, miracles. It is a peculiarity and an infirmity of our nature, an infirmity not to be overcome without considerable effort of reflection, that only unusual and startling phenomena seem to be of divine origination, and expressive of the divine character and will. When, therefore, he who implanted in us this tendency acts miraculously, *i. e.* unusually, he knows, and therefore designs, that we shall ascribe the event emphatically to him ; he issues it as an expository fact ; as indicative of the character which we are to attribute to him. It is a selected lesson, a special example, for the child who is generally too inattentive to his parent's conduct to gather from it the sentiment of reverence and the principles of duty. But surely it is not to be received as a prohibition, but rather as an incentive, to the study of his ordinary administration. When the Almighty Father awakens us with an unexpected expression of his character, it is that we may seek the traces of that character wherever it is less startlingly impressed, and understand and interpret the government under which we live. When he scatters to the winds the doubts of materialism, and rends with the flash of life the scorn of the misanthropist, and snatches the Christ from the grave, and through a host of impossibilities at which philosophy had shaken the head in sadness, bears him visibly to the immortal land, it is that we may go in quest of other pointings to futurity,

and explain the scenes of earthly life afresh, and discern the prospective attitude of providence in the wants and capacities of our nature, in the progress of our kind, in the sorrows and inequalities of our mortality. Revealed religion is not an interdict from the study of natural, but an invitation to it.

It is a noble testimony to the impression which the order of creation is calculated to produce, that those who have understood it most profoundly have had the loftiest appreciation of the religion of nature. Some, indeed, there are in the catalogue of philosophers (such was La Place) who despised all religion from whatever source derived; who became so enamoured of mechanism, that it haunted their understandings and drove out the higher perceptions of intellectual and moral relations; who had so habitually paced in the solid steps of material causation, that the agency of anything so impalpable as mind seemed like a phantom of superstition; who, having persuaded themselves by physiological speculation that their own souls were but an organism, and thought an ether, and feeling a fluid, reduced God to universal gravitation, and Providence to an all-pervading electricity. But those men of science, who have possessed any sense of religion, have, in the most distinguished instances, yielded their reverence to the teachings of nature. Why need I go for examples beyond the most familiar names of our own country? Locke, the father of modern intellectual philosophy, while he was also one of the most successful elucidators of Christianity, recognised the impress of divine wisdom in that human understanding whose mysteries he interpreted; in the process by which the infant's senses grow into the soul of man, and from the rude materials of our early experience arise the subtile and symmetrical order of the cultivated mind, he beheld the spiritual architecture of God; in the laws of intellect he traced intelligence, and detected a divine thinker in the powers of thought. And is it not a noble thing, when Newton in his immortal work has led you through the travels of his

patient and mighty thought, when, with wise precaution, having firmly fastened his thread of calculation on the globe he goes with it to the moon, and paces with you the solar tracks from planet to planet, and toils in the twilight confines of the system, till he has twined a web of beautiful relations around all, embracing earth and ocean, and suns and satellites, as in a tissue of light, which links and illuminates at once; when he has reached the limits of finite magnificence, and amid the scene of material sublimity stands, himself the sublimest object, as the emblem of godlike intellect: is it not a noble thing to see him at last burst into the infinite, and kneel? <sup>1</sup>

While philosophers have attached themselves specially to natural religion (with a profound love however, in the cases I have mentioned, to Christianity), divines, for the most part, have had an exclusive appreciation of the Gospel. Their faith and piety have adverted only to those expressions of divine character with which they were specially familiar, the history and teachings of Christ and the Apostles. The natural conclusion from this would surely be, that from each class of God's operations, the miraculous or the natural, might the feelings of trust and devotion flow; that those who looked most closely into either saw there the greater indication of the qualities that call forth reverence; that the Providence of God is beneficent in giving us both, in order that, the one having illustrated the other, the different wants of different minds may find a suitable supply; and that as the emotion, the state of affection, is the needful thing, it matters not from from which quarter it has its derivation, provided it really exists in vividness and power.

But the orthodox divine will not hear of this. He sneers at all natural religion, as not of the "vital" sort, treats it as a delusion of his arch enemy, Reason, and with the air of the Pharisee, calls it *pride*. His most moderate assertion is, that it is *worthless*. If asked *why*, he will say perhaps first,

because the teachings of nature are so uncertain, that it is impossible to learn anything satisfactory from them. Next press upon him this question ; if a man happens not to think these things uncertain, and draws from them a faith highly satisfactory to his own mind, if he takes from them the very same views of the divine character and a future life, which many Christians take from the scriptures, is that man's religion worthless ? He will at length come to the point and say, that in all this there is no saving faith, and that everything is useless, if there be not faith in the atoning sacrifice. It is not without example for theologians to go beyond this assertion of inutility, and to pronounce "*mere naturalism*," as they term it, positively *pernicious*. Give me, they exclaim, for a pupil the sheer, blank Atheist ; and away with the mischievous sentimentalism of natural piety.<sup>2</sup>

We cannot meet these assertions respecting the worthlessness or even mischief of natural religion, without adverting to the question, in what consists the value of religion ? how does it benefit us ? To this there are two answers.

The prevailing notion is, that a certain state of mind, belief in the vicarious merits of Christ, directly procures eternal life, and transfers the destination of the possessor from hell to heaven. No relation of cause and effect can be discovered between the condition and the consequence, the faith and the reward. Why the sanguinary sacrifice is to benefit only those who are aware of it, why God restricts his salvation to those who have a perception of his method in accomplishing it, why this unintelligible crime, of not seeing the atonement, happens to be the only sin for which there is no atonement, it is impossible to say. We are only told that the wrath of God rests upon it ; and that the single act of faith, that one conjunction of ideas in the mind of the worshipper, dissipates the cloud of divine anger, and draws down the smile of heaven. The agency then of this kind of religion is upon the mind of God, and it operates *as a charm*, without any perceptible causation,

but mysteriously and magically. The moment we have possessed ourselves of this wonderful belief, we carry about with us *a spell*, which renders us invulnerable by the ills of fatuity.

The other view of the value and influence of religion supposes it to act, not on the mind of God, but on the character of man ; and conceives it to be essential to the loftiness, refinement, and energy of that character. Religion may be regarded as a *form of truth*, the reception of which is requisite to the progress of the human intellect ; it unfolds relations the most majestic, blending the past, the present, and the future, in one sublime and harmonious plan, and making the material and the visible, but the vestibule to the spiritual and the unseen ; and the understanding which embraces not these relations is destitute of the conceptions which inspire and expand it most. Religion may be regarded as a *form of emotion*, the experience of which is needful to the powerful action of human affections ; it adds the element of infinitude to the objects of love, and trust, and hope, and dignifies the tenderness of our nature, and deepens its tones of reverence, and imparts to it that serenity of power which descends, wherever mighty expectations look down on the pleasures and sufferings of the present hour. Religion may be regarded as a *principle of duty*, the operation of which is indispensable to the supremacy of the sense of right ; it tempts the moral sentiments for ever to aspire, leads the mind to adore goodness under the name of God ; plants the will on a stage of action, which throws contempt on all littleness of aim, and spreads around it a silent canopy of lofty desires, quenchless and eternal as the heavens. In this view, religion is simply a part of the development of our mental and moral nature, the last and noblest exercise of reason, and love, and conscience. It is conducive and essential to our happiness hereafter, precisely as it is needful to our happiness here, because without it we are bereft of the most blessed portion of our being,

the highest knowledge and noblest sympathies. It saves us by improving us ; by rescuing us from the tyranny of low desires, and calling down upon us the peace of a well-ordered nature, which is the peace of God. It saves us, as the slave of animal passions is saved, when he is inspired with the new love of intellectual pleasures ; as the selfish heart is saved, when melted at length by some affectionate delight, and glowing from the first effort of disinterested will ; as the creature of irregular impulse is saved, when the sense of responsibility awakens and begins to set all things in order, and the principles of right are consulted instead of the gushes of feeling, and a thoughtful reverence for human happiness succeeds to the chance triumphs of generosity. It saves us, by enabling us to fulfil the purposes of our being ; not by adding one department of knowledge to our attainment, or a detached principle to our character ; but by pervading the whole mind and heart, as the universe is pervaded by God himself ; ordering and exalting everything ; and silently conducting the evolutions of our entire nature with harmony, power, and precision.

Now, if the value of religion is of the former kind, and consists in the belief of the merits of Christ's blood acting as a charm on the mind of Deity, of course natural religion, being destitute of this belief, must be *useless* ; though still it is difficult to see how it can be *pernicious*. If, on the other hand, the value of religion consists in its elevating influence on human character, it cannot matter whether its faith and feelings are suggested by nature or by scripture, provided the essential instruments of influence are there. And if two minds possess the same strength of belief in a perfect God, a universal Providence, and human immortality, and the one has derived his faith from scripture, the other from observation of creation and life, those minds are in states equally eligible.

Still the question is unanswered why the orthodox often treat natural religion not simply as *useless*, but as absolutely pernicious.

cious. The reason, I apprehend, is that it indisposes the mind to make use of their charm. Not only is it *empty of it*, but it is found by experience to be positively opposed to it. Most of those who have entertained a high respect for natural religion have been heterodox in their Christian theology. Clarke, the representative of the metaphysical school of writers on natural theology, was an Arian, and therefore without belief in the *Infinite* sacrifice; Paley, the representative of the practical school, was avowedly a Conformist from poverty, not from principle. Locke maintained that no seeming revelation could render anything credible that is not reasonable. Newton is known to have been infected by the Unitarian heresy. All this experience proves, that wherever the habit and the taste have been acquired, of exercising the reason on the moral and religious relations of the human being, the saving faith loses its chances of acceptance; that the evidence of nature cannot be made to succumb before fancied essentials of scripture; and that, with whatever ingenuity and sincerity inspiration may be called in to thrust back the encroachments of the understanding, the result in the long run of any competition with the natural reason of mankind will inevitably be defeat. It is the intuitive perception of this danger, the consciousness that their favourite spell of belief in the vicarious merits of Christ is contradicted by the analogy of nature, and will give way before that contradiction, which determines the orthodox to cry down the religion derived by the natural mind from the common works and ways of God. If nature be not stifled, their faith is gone.

This contradiction of our creed by our natural judgments is indeed frequently acknowledged, and is set down to the score of human corruption and fallibility. This appeal was discussed in my last Lecture; and it was shown that, as inspiration itself is a probability resting on our judgment, it can never prove anything which, on the evidence of a yet higher probability, that judgment deems false. Whenever, therefore, a



contradiction takes place between the attestation of nature and that of scripture, the opposite evidences must be weighed, and the decision given, wherever the preponderance lies.

On which side, in the present instance, the preponderance lies, it is astonishing that any one can even pause to consider. If Christianity really staked every one's eternal happiness on his belief of a sacrifice for sin, which, according to the unperturbed moral feelings of nine people out of ten, would itself be the most gigantic of all sins, no evidence that can be conceived, far less any that exists, could render Christianity credible. That God should make *any* form of opinion, even the most reasonable, a condition of immortal well-being, that he should seek to persuade us by brandishing terrors in our view, would imply such an ignorance of our nature, such a poverty of reason, such a confusion of the functions of the understanding and the will, such a barbaric exercise of sheer power, that in proportion as we ascribe to him the attributes of wisdom and of goodness, we shall feel it to be impossible. And that he should select for his condition of salvation a doctrine which is not only unsupported by any analogy of nature, but absolutely contradicted by all; which is metaphysically absurd, for guilt and innocence are no more transferable than intellect or eyesight; which is morally absurd, for it represents Christ as crucified under remorse for the sins of men, which he never committed, and of which therefore he had neither memory nor consciousness; which denies the moral excellence of God, for it represents him as conferring boundless blessedness on the wicked, and venting the tempest of infinite vengeance on spotless innocence,—precisely the most shocking crime which our imaginations can invent;—that God should choose this faith as the only access to his mercy, may be admitted when language ceases to have meaning, and reason abdicates its seat. Such a doctrine would weigh down, by its internal incredibility, the whole mass of external evidence by which a revelation could be supported.

And easy indeed would be the triumph of the opponents of the Gospel, had they this lever with which to upset its truth.

Natural religion, then, cannot be objected to, on the ground that it indisposes us to receive the supposed point of saving faith ; for if Christianity demands the faith (which it does not), Christianity is false, and the demand may be neglected ; and if it does not, its feelings and requirements cease to be at variance with the dictates of natural piety.

Revelation, then, is not a contradiction to the great principles of natural religion ; this would destroy its evidence. Neither is it a mere record of them ; this would render it useless. The true light in which to regard it is, that it is an *assumption* of some, and an *anticipation* or *confirmation* of others.

I say, it is an *assumption* of some. It does not prove, it takes for granted, the grand fundamental principles of Theism, *that there is a God, and that he is ONE*. Little reflection is needed to convince any one that of these the scriptures do not, and could not, offer any evidence. In order to perceive this, conceive a mind to be destitute of these ideas, and immersed in Atheism ; and suppose a revelation to be presented to it. The communication must be guaranteed by miracle ; but what is miracle to one who has no previous conception of a God ? It is but a strange and curious fact, no more suggesting to his thought any religious ideas, than if water were to freeze on his fire, or a tree of his garden to blossom in the frost. It would imply, indeed, some power in nature with which he was not familiar ; but that that power was an intelligent will, and not rather a mechanical force, could not possibly be inferred by him. It would teach him that there was something hidden, but would only drive him to his experiments again to discover in what region of science it lurked. A miracle, indeed, simply as miracle, is a memento, not a proof, of God ; for the existence of mind is to be evidenced,

not by displays of power, but by symptoms of design. And that the Unity of the Deity cannot be established by miracle is no less certain. For supernatural facts might exist where there is a multitude of supernatural powers, with at least as great probability as where there is but one. Of these two truths, then, revelation presupposes us to be possessed. It relies upon their recognition by our minds ; it appeals to their power over our thoughts. And thus the very existence of revelation is a solemn sanction to the sublime and simple elements of natural religion ; it proclaims us competent to their discovery ; it invites us to ascertain and trust their truth.

And while I admit, and indeed earnestly maintain, that to Christianity we are indebted for the knowledge at an early period, and the diffusion, by the power of its authority through myriads of minds, otherwise unreclaimed, of all the other great principles of religion ;—though the blessed faith in a universal providence would not, I believe, have descended from the inaccessible heights of a few philosophical minds, had not Christ told us of Him that paints the lilies of the field, and watches the sparrow as it falls ;—though the inspiring anticipation of immortality would not have penetrated the heart of society, and illumined the recesses of misery, and nerved the arm of virtue, had not Christ achieved the triumph of the tomb ; still, acknowledging the Gospel to be the *record*, the register of sacred truths, I cannot forget that creation is the scene of their exhibition, the residence of the reality. God's name is in the Bible ; his presence is in the world. Inspiration *speaks* of his power ; creation exemplifies it. Sacred men declare his wisdom ; a more sacred universe displays it. In the delicate organisms of the animal world, whose variety outnumbers our computation ; in the earth, which is prepared for their habitation,—its parts no less various than they ; in the relations which unite their instincts with its changes of light and darkness and heat and cold ; in

that most wonderful model of sentient being, perceiving, reflecting, feeling, and prospective man; in the process by which he passes from the animal into the reasoning creature, from the selfish to the affectionate, from the mechanical to the responsible, from the earthly almost to the divine; in the knowledge which enraptures his intellect, and the ties which capture his affections, and the hopes which cheer his griefs; does that goodness of God *act* of which Prophets and Apostles speak. And in the history of nations, in their birth from barbaric elements, but tendencies to progressive civilization; in the successive encroachments of arts on arms, and reason on force, and the welfare of the many on the interests of the few; in the mighty agencies by which tyranny is made to quail, and superstition beaten back in its triumph, and ignorance driven from its throne; in the raising up of gifted individual minds, and the adaptation of their genius and their characters to the wants of their generation; in the creation of a Luther to shake the sleep of corruption by the thunder of his voice; of a Washington, endowed with the imperturbable patience and disinterested wisdom needful to baffle the will and disappoint the arts of practised oppressors, and generate, by the force of pertinacity, the liberty of a new world; of a Scott or a Wordsworth, commissioned to refresh a people's heart with the sympathies of the past and the humanities of the present, and soothe the impatience for things yet to be, by drawing forth the beauty of what has been and what is, and thus breathe the spirit of reverence over the spirit of improvement, we behold the real and living operation of that Providence of which Christ was the proclaimer and the impersonation. And in the quenchless capacities of human nature, in the aspiring of its understanding, in the peace of virtue, in the terrors of sin that cannot stand the calm gaze of God, we see the predictions which life gives of immortality, the signatures which our Creator has impressed on our constitution, of his glorious intentions, and our eternal progress.

## LECTURE VI.

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### INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON MORALITY AND CIVILIZATION.

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JOHN I. 17.

GRACE AND TRUTH CAME BY JESUS CHRIST.

DURING eighteen centuries of very various history, the experiment of Christianity must be regarded as having been fairly tried. Sixty successive generations and a multitude of contemporaneous tribes have been educated under its influence, constituting no trivial proportion of the present population, and the past duration of the world. No one, indeed, can look at the vast portions of mankind yet unreclaimed by its power, or reflect what a mere point two decades of ages may be in the whole range of providential design, without being prepared for new and startling developments of this religion, as it falls upon modifications of character which it has never tried, and conditions of society yet uncreated. Still, however large a future history may be in reserve for our religion, it is not to be doubted that already its prevailing tendencies, its most potent energies must have betrayed themselves; its mission can no longer be a secret, nor all that it has yet accomplished be regarded as its mere preliminaries. Whatever it *has* effected, it must have been *designed* to

effect : in the providence of God, the contemplated can be no other than the actual result. And from the new elements which Christianity has introduced into the history of the world, from its past operation on the intellect and affections of individual men, and the social spirit and institutions of communities, we may learn what is the errand on which it is sent, and the influences which it is its essential function to exert.

To determine, however, what our religion really has effected in the world is a task of no ordinary difficulty. Every one can point, no doubt, to the external and material changes which it has introduced into human life,—the alterations in the forms and habits of society. And were an ancient Greek to be reborn in modern England, his eye would fix at once on the Gothic cathedral, replacing the graceful fanes of his own land. He would be struck with the sequestration of one day in seven from the vulgar pursuits of gain and of ambition, and the cheerful summons of the Sabbath bell, and the decent throng of all social orders to one spot, not for the amusement of the theatre, or the excitement of the games, but the simpler ends of instruction and of prayer. He would notice the altered character of our anniversaries, nor deny that our rites of Christmas are not less graceful and attractive than the festive days of gayer Athens. But into the system of feelings and ideas of which these outward changes are the fruit, it would be long before he could obtain an insight. That the dim and mystic perspective of the minster is the symbol of a solemn and aspiring devotion, heaving beneath the weighty conceptions of infinitude and eternity; that the Sunday worship is in memory of universal providence and in anticipation of a perpetual life; that the warm greetings of this season \* are but the recognition of human brotherhood, and its branch of winter green the emblem of life in death, and

\* This lecture was delivered on the Sunday after Christmas day.

the joyous gathering of families about the hearth the picture of the great reunion in heaven ; these interpretations of our social forms would present themselves, only after he had acquired a sympathy with the secret spirit of the scene amid which he is thrown. Moreover, even feelings and ideas which appear in intimate union with modern religion, are not always to be ascribed to Christianity. For the Gospel must be modified by the state of the minds that receive it ; it does not annihilate their prejudices, their passions, their philosophy ; it does not cancel the tendencies of individual organization, of country, or of class ; it does not suspend the agency of those moral and political causes which form the character of nations. Superinduced upon all these, it becomes amalgamated with them, and contributes its share, often separately indistinguishable, to the production of new thoughts and emotions. There is but one way of determining what particular features of our morality and civilization are to be ascribed to the Gospel. We must apply the tests of *permanence and universality* : the notions and practices which have attached themselves only to one age or country must be cast aside as casual and accidental, belonging not to Christianity, but to the minds that received it. But those great universal peculiarities of thought and action which have either been constant companions of its spread, travelling with it from land to land, bursting forth alike in barbarism and in civilization, denizens of the East and of the West, common to the free and the enthralled,—or have never long been absent from its presence, as if incapable of separation, and waiting ever to obey its voice of recall ;—these sentiments, if we can find such, may be fixed upon as the staple wealth of Christianity,—the central and indestructible ideas which God sent it forth to preach to the common heart of humanity. Conceive, then, the several pupils of Christianity, however various, to be collected into one spot ; let a vast assembly be formed, with a representative from every school, every period, and every clime ; let the voluptuous Asiatic

come, whom the Gospel turned from luxury of the senses to luxury of soul, and who mused on the Invisible beneath the dreamy starlight of his native plains : let the degenerate Roman come, whose sterner qualities were kindled again by the power of the new faith, whose departed patriotism it inspired again with the love of a better country, and whose heroism it revived in the form of martyrdom ; let the Northern chieftain come, in whom the peaceful Gospel is tinged with blood from his own passions,—who tramples on nations in the name of Christ, and in the wilderness he makes, uplifts his savage hands in prayer, and thinks his Christian veneration adequately proved, if, when he overwhelms the temple, he spares the church, and protects the Christian pastor, while he murders the Pagan priest : let the pilgrim come, who seeks relief from the burden of his sin in the toil of travel, and the outbreak of local veneration at the sepulchre of the crucified : let the feudal baron come, whose piety appeared chiefly in devout bequests ; the indolent anchorite of Egypt, with the stirring reformer of Germany ; the gay Cistercian with the stern Puritan : let all appear in one motley multitude to tell their story, and exhibit their type of the Gospel ; and when all are severally disrobed of their peculiar costume of mind, whatever common features of character and colours of sentiment remain still visible in all, must be pronounced essentially characteristic of Christianity.

One of the universal sentiments which Christianity has deeply imbedded in the human heart is that of the *natural equality of men*. I mean by this phrase to describe, not the metaphysical doctrine (which is false) that all men are born with the same intellectual and moral aptitudes ; nor the economical doctrine (which is equally false) that all men should possess an equal amount of property ; nor the political doctrine (which can rarely be true) that all men should be invested with the same civil privileges ; but the religious doctrine, that all are of one blood, children of One Father, protected by



One Providence, and, consciously or unconsciously, appointed to one life eternal. This truth, sublime in its simplicity, has through the agency of Christianity, taken deep root in human nature. It is easy indeed for the misanthropic student of history (who is always its superficial reader) to produce a long catalogue of crimes, which appears to throw contempt upon this sentiment. He may point to slavery,—to the sale of human life as a commodity,—to the barter for gold of the volitions of a responsible being, in every age of Christendom, from the downfall of Rome to the present disorders of the American Republic; to the long degradation of the feeble half of the human race; to the serfs of the middle ages, doomed to be the labouring cattle of the soil; to the poor of all times, contemplated by other classes in the spirit of insult or the pride of neglect; their passions plied by politicians, their superstitions amused by priests, their industry taxed, their minds darkened, their bodies mowed down in the war of tyrants. Yet with all these things in full view, and with the biting sense of shame which they fix upon one's human heart, it is only truth to say, that the faith in the brotherhood of men has never died out since Christianity came in. Nor has it been powerless against oppression, though the oppressor himself has sometimes pressed it into his service, and profaned it into an argument for passive submission to wrong. The rich and great have sent their smooth-tongued priest to the hovels of the friendless, to preach the lessons of content; when extortion has made them poor in substance, to persuade them that they are rich in faith; when the unequal hand of man is crushing them, to tell them of the equal eye of God that is over all; when the earth has been turned before them into a desert, to keep them quiet by promising the Paradise of Heaven. The most depressed and ignorant can see through the sophistry of this insult; they speedily discover, that the natural use of this argument is as a two-edged sword against the oppression which vainly strives to wield it. If all men

bear the same relation to God in heaven, where is the tyrant's title to claim the homage of a God on earth? If all are accountable to the tribunal above, shall he mock at the obligation to do justice and love mercy? If the earth in its length and breadth be gifted with fertility and decked with beauty for the sake of all, who can wrest from labour its rewards, but the offender against the impartiality of Providence? If the great elements of humanity, the senses which link us with the outward world, and ties which bind us to our kind, and the understanding which thinks, and the heart that bleeds for suffering, and the hope that aspires to God, be the heritage of every soul, where can be the justice of the social position which debases them all, and obliterates every trace of a diviner nature? And, since the Gospel was preached, this mode of reasoning has from time to time broken out, to the great terror of evil doers, and the great progress of human liberty. It has been incapable indeed of preventing the wrongs of power; but it has pressed, as an elastic force against them, and placed a limit to their violence. For, the advantage of true and noble principles does not vanish, even when all sincere assent to them seems to be gone; there is a distance beyond which the practice of men cannot depart from their professions; there is a point at which the perception of inconsistency bursts into shame in the agent, and indignation in the observer; a reformation is demanded; a return to first principles proclaimed; and the resistless fiat of the public conscience makes all things new. The great principle of natural equality, has always had strong attractions for the human heart; it has lurked in almost every struggle by which the progress of European society has been advanced; it has breathed a spirit of dignity, and a lofty energy of principle into the conflicts of class after class for social emancipation, and turned them into a competition of moral with physical force. No sooner had Christianity fairly pervaded the Roman empire, than uneasiness was felt respecting the disposition of

the slaves. They seized with eagerness on the new faith ; at its invitation they ceased to be outcasts ; they lost the passiveness of mere property ; they rose to the dignity of a responsible existence, and assumed its heritage of feelings, and desires, and volitions ; they felt the ties that bound them to their race, and were warmed by the sympathies of fellowship : publicly scorned in the world, in the secret worship of the church they received the honour due to all men ; suspected in all things else, they were proud to be trusted with the persecuted Christians' oath of mutual fidelity ; denied the citizenship of Rome, they loved the citizenship of faith ; without a country on the earth, the brethren in Christ became their countrymen, and the altar their domestic hearth. They rose into the humanities of existence, and became dangerous to those who lived on its inhumanities ; they acquired a conscience, and were from that moment terrible ; they learned the idea of duty, which borders closely on the idea of rights. The same sentiment inspired and ennobled the frequent struggles of the serfs of feudalism. It was the theme of the orators who banded together the men of Kent in the days of Wat Tyler ; and when John Ball, " a foolish priest " (I use the words of the old chronicler), " preached publicly, that in the beginning of the world there were no bondmen, wherefore none ought to be bondman without he did treason to his Lord, as Lucifer did to God ; but the peasants were neither angels nor spirits, but *men* formed to the similitude of their lords ;—why then shall they be kept under like wild beasts ? And why, if they laboured, should they have no wages ?"—vain was it for the Archbishop of Canterbury to throw the plebeian preacher into his dungeon ; the magic truth had gone forth ; the lesson eternally graven on the human heart had been interpreted ; thousands started up at the generous voice, and though branded with the name of rebels, made it felt that they were men. So, too, the Reformation had scarcely given to the Gospel a republication, than the same spirit rallied the pea-

sants of Germany, long ground to the earth, around the noble-hearted and calumniated Muncer ; the disciple whom Luther delighted to persecute, because, by more generous sympathies than his own, he stole the hearts of the people. While Luther was intriguing with princes and nobles, he traversed the villages of his country, taught the peasantry the principles of natural justice, and laid open to the men that till the earth the perilous truth, that God hath made all of one blood. He loudly claimed for them the rights common to mankind, and explained those rights in a manifesto, which (to use the words of Voltaire) "a Lycurgus might have signed."<sup>1</sup> Wherever Christianity has been published, in its first diffusion by Apostles, and its second development by reformers, this great and binding truth has gone forth in power ; it has broken in upon the carnival of oppression, and stopped the fierce revels that made humanity their sport ; at its sound, the trampled have started to their feet ; the children of the soil have looked up and felt over them the canopy of heaven ; the debased have grown conscious of the stirrings of a soul ; and they that had been treated as the kindred of the clod, have burned with the aspirings of the skies.

But this great sentiment has led to a more interesting result than these struggles of the injured for their own deliverance. It has produced the spectacle, which I believe to be peculiar to Christian times, of one class uplifting another, the happy toiling for the miserable, the free vindicating the rights of the oppressed. With all the noble examples of disinterested friendship and patriotism which ancient history affords, I can remember no approach to that *wholesale compassion*, that general action of one order of society on another, that system of *benevolent agitation* in behalf of powerless and forgotten suffering, which characterizes the history of modern times. With what silent and irresistible power did the Gospel, wherever it travelled, raise one half of the human race into a moral existence ; and, without the utterance of a single claim, with

no assumption of right, but by a spontaneous concession of respect, elevate the wife from the creature to the friend of man, from the source of offspring to the mother of a family, and the presiding spirit of a home. And compare, too, the institution of slavery, or rather the feelings with which it was regarded in ancient and in modern times. Slaves constituted the great majority of the population of the Roman empire; they were fed like cattle; they were lodged in subterraneous holes; they worked in the fields with chained feet; they were passed in trade from province to province, mercilessly wrenched from every human tie; goaded to despair, only to be murdered in vengeance; happy if they were but worn to the bone, that they might not be worth tormenting, or could escape to the forests to the tenderer mercies of their brute inhabitants.—Who ever raised a voice for those wretched beings? What solitary remonstrance ever broke the sanction of a universal silence? What invective ever tare the heart of this corruption, and kindled with its flame even a transitory shame? What missionary of Pagan mercy ever crept into the groaning fields, and whispered the word of peace, and fell to the earth with the sob of sympathy? Where were the abolition societies of the proud empire—the mistress of art, the metropolis of civilization, the boasted inheritor of ancient virtue? A silence as of death, the stillness of universal sin, the apathy of lost humanity, pervades its vast dominions. Yet those poor sufferers were most obviously of one blood with their possessors; of the same colour, of like features, often of the same language and the same stock; with no other separation from them than that they were captives, perhaps of a revolted city, or a vanquished province. Look them in the face together, and you know not the slave from his master, except from his misery and his chains. I do not wish to treat too leniently the prejudice of colour; but I do say that the slavery of the African, with all its enormity, is removed by some shades above the slavery of the conquered provincial of Rome; it does not imply that

blackest dye of guilt which can be deepened by no added stain, the total abdication of the last lingering mercies of the hardened heart ; it has the palliations, paltry, I admit, yet real, which are derived from the savage life and visible traces of inferior organization in its victim. For it is impossible to deny that the impressions of bodily deformity, and the conviction of mental degradation, have great power to dry up natural sympathies, and render the feeling of compassion less prompt and deep.<sup>2</sup> Glory, then, be to the great prophet of Nazareth, that "those who are afar off" from our instinctive affinities he hath brought near by the power of his faith, by the declaration of a common nature, by the appeal to a common responsibility, and the memory of a common Father ; that, while Pagan Rome had not a tear for a very brother, his religion had a flood of mercy for the negro and the alien, and raised an accumulating cry of shame amongst the nations, and stretched forth an arm of omnipotent deliverance across the ocean. This is no triumph of mere knowledge ; no project of political philosophy ; no successful game of self-interest ; no intrigue of party warfare ; but one of those glorious achievements of national virtue, at which it is delightful to hear the worldly scoff : for it proves that it is above their mark ; that it is another victory of lofty and disinterested beneficence ; another noble response to the battle-cry of the Prince of Peace, summoning his hosts to the conquest of suffering and the rescue of humanity.

There is another expression of the fraternal spirit of Christianity which no careful observer of the composition of sects can fail to notice ; I mean the internal morality of churches. We justly lament the sectarianism of our country. We are reasonably weary of the strife of tongues, whose jargon mars our peace. We deplore the intolerant exclusiveness which overruns society with sectional hatreds. Look at each body of Christians in its relation to others and all seems dissension ; religion appears as the great disuniting agency, which baffles

the projects of a wise philanthropy, and steps in to disappoint each comprehensive hope. But turn from this wider view, and from the general array of sects single out some one ; penetrate to its interior spirit, its secret organization, the mutual relations of its members ; watch how it works within itself, when no known eye is on it, and the passions of controversy are still and distant. All is peaceful, affectionate, merciful ; you see a genuine and sincere association for the attainment and exercise of Christian goodness, in which each keeps a wakeful, but not malignant, eye on the conduct and temper of his fellows, and a conscientious circumspection on his own ; which provides its officers of instruction, and its inspectors of the poor, and its visitors of the aged, and its reception for the stranger, and its pity for heathen delusion, and its open arms for stricken sin. There is ignorance, no doubt, there is fanaticism ; there is room for evil passions and the hypocrisy of designing men : but there is much love, and therefore great hope ; there is a pure and fresh sincerity ; a meek and silent piety ; a true and toiling beneficence, in which he is to be wondered at who finds nothing to remind him of Jesus the crucified.<sup>3</sup>

Another sentiment which appears to be attributable to Christianity (for it has accompanied it over the world) is the *importance of speculative truth to the great mass of mankind*. I select this idea for distinct notice, because it is immediately connected with the greatest mischiefs that have been charged on Christianity, mischiefs which have so absorbed the attention of men, that the benefits for which we are indebted to the same cause have been little observed. It is needless for me to dwell on the evils which have followed in its train, and the extravagances which it has been used to justify ; for of these the preceding lectures have been one prolonged illustration. That speculative truth has been held to be, not only important to the improvement of mankind here, but absolutely essential to their acceptance hereafter ; that

this notion has been the parent of intolerance, and impertinence, and pride; has fostered the spirit, and wielded the arms of persecution; has arrested the natural progress of opinion, and postponed that tranquil repose of faith on reason, without which it is but a fevered dream, I have already, not only admitted, but maintained. The picture, however, has another side; and from this same sentiment, so injurious in one direction, have been derived, in another, two benefits, which I would briefly indicate.

The extreme and exaggerated importance which men have attached to the possession of speculative truth, has led them to cling with invincible tenacity to their own portion of truth,—*i. e.*, to the expression of their own opinions. Believing their own faith to be their great title to immortality, their solitary plank of refuge amid a sea of perils, they have refused the call of interest and menaces of power, and the frown of ecclesiastical tyranny, bidding them quit their hold. Thus was created a venerable virtue of our Fathers,—a virtue unknown in ancient times,—of *testifying to the truth*; which is only the quaint and puritanical description of a resolute intellectual independence, esteeming its convictions more than its interests, and determined at all hazards to maintain a profound sincerity of faith, and a free exercise of worship. This stern maintenance, this frank publication of opinion, would never have existed, but for association with religious sentiment; it is a virtue born of a superstition,—a virtue, moreover, of the highest order, if we estimate it by the blessings which it confers upon the world, by the stimulus it administers to enquiry, the acceleration which it gives to the discovery of truth, and the feeling of mutual respect which it excites between man and man. Nor is there much fear that this quality will disappear, when the erroneous reasons on which it rested at first have been subverted. It has been fairly tried now; its claims to veneration rest upon experiment, and receive thence an abundant vindication. No one who has seen what the world owes to the



dignified and unbending adherence to opinion, no one who compares the lax professions, the accommodating philosophy, the polite conformity with popular superstition, prevailing of old in Greece and Rome, with the spirit of modern dissent,—with the history of covenanted Scotland, her children hunted over moor and mountain, kneeling in the fastness, and sleeping on the sod, rather than bow before the altar of Episcopacy and mutter the hated prayer of hypocrisy,—with the exile of the Puritans, who exchanged civilization for barbarism, the domestic hearth for the Atlantic storms, the warm cities of Old England for the bleak rocks of America, the golden fields for the mournful forest, that they might worship with a free soul and be at rest ;—no one, who thus studies the spirit and the fruits of guileless thought and speech, will fail to recognize in them the guardians of knowledge, the liberators of nations, the creators of New Worlds.

Again : this sentiment, of the importance of speculative truth to the human mind, has led men, not only themselves to cling to their convictions, but to urge them, often from motives of fanatical benevolence, on others. They have imagined a particular system of ideas to be necessary to the salvation of their fellow-men. But a system of ideas cannot be embraced except by the understanding ; and if men must have the ideas, their understandings must be open to receive them. Hence this sentiment leads directly to the recognition of the intellectual and moral nature of all mankind ; it contemplates them as capable of thought and of emotion, and as sustaining a like spiritual relation to the Father of all. Notwithstanding all the superstitious notions that adhere to it, it annihilates at once the disposition to regard the ignorant and depressed as having a physical existence without a soul, as machines for production, and creatures for toil ; it claims for them the great and high prerogatives of life and of futurity ; it humbles the monopolizing pride of knowledge, and proposes to bring to the level of all the portions of truth that most sanctify and

bless. Practically, it is this very idea which has led to the efforts and prepares the triumphs of popular education. It was the desire that all might read the scriptures, that rallied together the advocates of instruction ; and had those scriptures never been, who would venture to say how long Europe might have remained afflicted with a besotted population, and immersed in the darkness of barbaric life.

Such I regard as the leading principles, by which Christianity has exerted influence on human morality and civilization. By its sentiment of universal brotherhood, it has nerved the arm of the oppressed seeking to be free, it has produced the benevolence of class to class, and rendered pure and affectionate the interior morality of churches. By the sentiment of the importance of speculative truth to the great mass of men, it has created the virtue of honest speech, and commenced the education of the multitudes.

Who can cast his eye over the nations which profess, and those which reject the Gospel, without beholding in it the benignest of earthly agencies, and the divinest of heaven's gifts ! Who can compare the East which it has deserted with the West which it pervades, — the uniform decrepitude of society in the one, with its various moral life in the other, the triumph of violence and superstition there, with the gradual spread of knowledge and just government here, without recognizing in it an influence preservative of the health and conducive to the progress of the general mind ? Whether or not its extension throughout the foremost communities of our world be the chief cause of their advancement, whether it be the germ or the fruit of their civilization, there is still an undeniable affinity between its spirit and the noblest tendencies of the human race. What religion ever produced so little misery in its corruptions, and so lofty a virtue by its native power. It has presided, like a creative energy, over the moral world, and constructed new types of character, and new forms of genius, and new visions of ideal good. Science,

poetry, and art have given it the homage of their mingled voices; the sorrowful, the anxious, and the happy have kneeled together at its shrine: the peasant has felt its nobility, and the sage rejoiced in its illumination: and if its name has sometimes spread a shield over the persecutor, in its spirit the persecuted have found the consolation of inward dignity, and the strength of quenchless will.

Faith of our fathers! whence they drew a divine strength for their toils, and peace in their sufferings; which gave them hope when they fell asleep in Jesus, and opened the heaven where now they dwell for evermore! Faith of bards and philosophers, of prophets, and martyrs, of the best friends of humanity, and foes of misery and wrong!—Faith of Milton and of Howard, which inspired the muse of the one to breathe the strains of piety and liberty at once, and armed the spirit of the other to brave disease, and pierce the prison gloom, that no child of guilt might be without his solace? Faith of the people! whose generosity priests have been unable to extinguish, and with whose tendencies to freedom tyrants have grappled in vain! Not yet are all thy triumphs won;—not till the last and lowest victims of poverty, and ignorance, and sin have been redeemed, and raised to the consciousness of intelligence and the sense of immortality! In meek majesty hast thou been borne over the high places of our world, like thy great Author on the Mount of Olives. Descend yet deeper into the vales, where human suffering hides itself and weeps. Still behold the city of our dwelling through tears and pity and make us worthy to join in the exulting cry, Hosannah! to the son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!



## A P P E N D I X.

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### PORTION OF A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR, FROM THE REV. J. BLANCO WHITE.

“June, 1836.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—The constant and almost involuntary employment of my mind on the painful subject of the divisions of Christians, produces an habitual desire to exert myself in the as yet hopeless work of diminishing the sources of that great evil.

“There is a point from which all writers on Christian liberty seem instinctively to recoil: it is the *authority* of the Bible. And yet whilst that authority remains undefined,—as long as all Christians are taught to look upon the whole collection, from Genesis to the end of the book of Revelation, as the immediate and direct *Word of God*, and oracle before which human judgment is bound to submit, renouncing its natural rights,—to talk of *spiritual* liberty, under such a mental yoke, is almost mockery. I have already stated, in my “Observations on Heresy and Orthodoxy,” some of the results of a long and anxious examination of this subject. I have proved, as I conceive, that it would be more consistent with intellectual or spiritual freedom to live under the whole Mosaic routine of *external* practices, than under the obligation of receiving the philosophy, history, chronology, and astronomy of the Bible. Whoever does not feel this cannot be a judge of this question.

Mental freedom,—the right to give free scope to the noblest powers of his nature,—would be a dead letter to such a man.

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“(9.) But I must condense what I have to say, and for that purpose I beg to call your attention to the fact, that the obscure and indefinite notions of such a *moral* duty in regard to the Bible cannot be traced to any legitimate source. This absence of an unquestionable and clear divine injunction is sufficient to upset the whole theory which supposes Christianity to have its ground in the Bible. I beg to be clearly understood upon this subject. In denying that the *authority* of the Scriptures is the foundation of Christianity, I am far from asserting that the Bible is useless to Christians. ‘The question is not’ (I will say with Barclay, the apologist of the Quakers, whose work contains admirable hints on this subject), ‘The question is not what may be profitable or helpful, but what is absolutely necessary. Many things may contribute to further a work, which yet are not the main thing that makes the work go on.’\* What I oppose is the almost universal notion, that the first and essential condition of being a Christian is to submit to the *authority* of the Scriptures. This is a gratuitous assumption. To demand *respect* for the various books of the Bible, in proportion to the *critical* probability that they are the writings of apostles or prophets, is rational; but respect is not submission, nor does respect exclude examination and dissent. The exclusion of these inalienable rights of a free, rational creature, must be grounded upon direct, unquestionable, and definite divine command; and such command has never been made known to men. Conjecture and inference are of no avail. My right to judge is clearer than any *conjecture* that God wishes me to renounce it.

“(10.) I have indeed been persuaded, for many, many years (though the importance of the subject has made me try and (as it were) ripen my persuasion by keeping it in my bosom), that the theory which makes Christianity rest upon the infalli-

\* Apology for the Quakers, Prop. II. § IV.

bility of the Bible is much more groundless than that which places it on the infallibility of the successor of St. Peter and his Church. Both these theories want truth ; but the latter (the Roman Catholic theory) is consistent within itself, and derives a very great plausibility from its perfect efficiency in settling questions among those that embrace it as emanated from the authority of Christ. The semi-Protestant view, which, admitting the necessity of a right faith (meaning assent to certain metaphysical and historical assertions), appeals in ultimate judgment to certain writings, must at once betray its groundlessness to every one who will dispassionately consider the total insufficiency of the proposed means for the attainment of the desired end. Grant the most literal and minute inspiration to the whole Bible, and it will still be found totally inadequate to the purpose of settling questions as to its own meaning, when such questions arise.

“(11.) It might indeed be supposed that the experience of three centuries would have opened the eyes of all Protestants on this point, and that they would now begin to perceive that Luther fell into an egregious error when he imagined that a system of orthodoxy, in the same spirit as that of the Church of Rome, could be maintained upon the basis of the *written* authority of the Scriptures ; that the idea of a *saving orthodoxy* could have even the slightest colouring of truth without a living rule of faith. But the clearest demonstrations on these subjects lose their power when superstitious fear paralyzes the logical faculty. Protestants of all denominations continue to denounce perdition on those who disagree with them on what they themselves have decreed to be *essentials* ; and, in spite of their long experience of the insufficiency of the Bible to put an end to these disgraceful feuds, they go on crying and protesting that it is the fault of their opponents,—that if those unfortunate men would only see certain texts in a certain light (*i. e.*, the light of the divines who think themselves aggrieved by the opponents’ obstinacy), the Protestants might soon rival the Church of Rome in unity.

“(12.) But why do I address these obvious observations to you, my dear friend, when I am fully aware that they are quite familiar to your mind?—I will tell you candidly why: because, though I have read not only with pleasure but with admiration your *Rationale* of Religion, I still more than doubt that you have allowed the principles on which we both agree to lead you into all the legitimate inferences which follow from them. You still take upon yourself to deny the name of Christians to men who claim it, only because their views do not fully agree with your own; you make a harsh declaration against certain divines whom you describe as *Rationalists*. Now, if by Rationalist you mean an expounder of the Scriptures who attempts to explain the miraculous narratives conjecturally by natural means, I, for one, will join you in declaring such an attempt as *generally* unsuccessful; but this is merely an exegetic question: I myself feel convinced that such a method of interpretation is unsatisfactory in by far the greater number of cases. Yet, if the liberties taken with the historical documents of the Bible were still much greater than those of the Rationalists, I would contend that no man has a right to deny the name of Christian to another who wishes to be known by that name, as long as it cannot be proved that he assumes it maliciously, and for the purpose of deception. To declare any one unworthy of the name of Christian because he does not agree with your *belief*, is to fall into the intolerance of the Articled Churches. The moment that the name *Christian* is made necessarily to contain in its signification belief in certain historical or metaphysical propositions, that moment the name itself becomes a *creed*: the length of that creed is of little consequence.

“(13.) In vain will it be said that according to this view the signification of the word Christianity may be reduced to a kind of negative quantity: such an objection assumes the great point in question,—namely, that Christ left a *positive* creed to be indispensably accepted by all his disciples. Until such a fact shall be proved, no man has a right to reject another from



the Christian union, on account of any abstract opinion whatever. Christ's disciples were not known by the name of Christians till it was given to them, as it would appear, by the public at Antioch. This fact is important, because it prevents verbal subtleties as to the original signification of that word. Christian was a *popular* name which the disciples accepted as one which avoided the invidiousness and contempt implied by the earlier one of *Nazarenes*. Thus it appears that *Christian* cannot be said to have had a scriptural sense, for, properly speaking, it is not scriptural. A *Christian* was originally (and should always continue to be) the designation of one who separated himself from Judaism and Heathenism, and joined the followers of Christ. Of the *reality* of his Christianity none could properly judge; for, according to the views of the primitive Christians attested by Paul, those alone were properly disciples who showed in the temper of their minds that they were under the guidance of a moral spirit similar to that of Christ. It is the *priestly* spirit, the spirit of hierarchical association, which has attached the idea of assent to certain dogmas to the name of *Christian*.

“(14.) Nevertheless, the priesthoods have not entirely succeeded in that work; the unsophisticated mass of laymen, when shocked by the appellation of heretic (in such countries as Spain and Italy), and of infidel (in England), do not derive their feeling of disgust and horror from the idea of doctrines denied by the heretic or infidel, but from a conviction that those words imply an unprincipled and immoral conduct. Imagine, for instance, the impression which would be produced upon a servant, especially a well-inclined and modest woman, who being on the point of entering the family of a *Rationalist*, were to hear from a respectable divine, that though the person in question was an honourable man, unfortunately he was not a *Christian*. You will very naturally say, that no one but a fiery enthusiast would use such language; I certainly agree with you: but the necessity which I believe you acknowledge of not using it in common parlance, shows the evil of employing it theologically.

“(15.) Whatever errors may have crept in among the simple yet sublime views published by Christ, the practical moral character of His Gospel has always stood prominently above the abstract doctrines. From the first publication of Christianity to this very day, it may be safely asserted, that no sincere convert has embraced it, allured by its creed. A longing after ‘whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report,’ will be found more or less to be the motive of every original or renewed attempt to be a *Christian*. There is therefore a great moral responsibility in every discouragement placed in the way of such moral impressions as induce men to cling to the name and title of Christians. An attachment to that denomination should be fostered by every friend of human virtue, as being, unquestionably among Europeans, the most evident sign of a living moral principle in the soul.

“(16.) Let us then anxiously reject every remnant of that hierarchical, that thoroughly priestly spirit, which cares for no virtue which does not bear the seal and impress of a certain Church. Let us follow the example of Christ in rejecting none who approached him. Such traits of benevolent liberality, which abound in the Gospels, cannot *rationaly* be suspected as being part of that superstructure of pious fraud which the early Christian priesthood began, and which their successors carried up to a monstrous height. The genuine views of Christ, the only true Christianity, will never combine with the hierarchical dogmas, so as to be undistinguishable. Christ’s mission was evidently a *reform*, compared with the *positive* or preceptive and ceremonial religions then in existence. The “Gospel of God’s kingdom” may be correctly called a *negative* system. Christ published the religion of *conscience*, which, though essentially grounded upon the nature of man, and having faithful disciples at all times and in all nations, those men who, being without a written law, “were a law to themselves,” and were just before God, “because they obeyed the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness,”

—had been obscured, and almost placed beyond the mental reach of the mass of mankind. Christ declared himself against all religions which made salvation, or spiritual safety, dependent on a priesthood and its peculiar offices. Hence the insurmountable difficulty with which all *successors*, and especially the Episcopal Protestants, have to contend; for if salvation must be dispensed to mankind through the hands of a *legitimate* priesthood, the world must be in a sad case as long as the titles shall continue in a state of the most hopeless litigation.

“(17.) What shall we say, then, of the still greater difficulty of finding the *learned* portion of Christianity,—that catalogue of historical and metaphysical propositions which every man is supposed to be concerned in, as he is concerned in his eternal happiness? Can a Christianity, containing a philosophical and critical department, be believed to have originated in that Jesus of Nazareth, whose anti-hierarchical and anti-rabbinical mental portrait is still transparent through the thick coating of sophistical and pharisaical paint which was spread over it before the middle of the second century?

“(18.) The practical meaning which the name Christian still preserves in the popular language of all Christian nations,—that fact to which I have already alluded, is to me a remarkable instance of the indestructible character of certain popular traditions. The Christian priesthoods have exerted themselves for ages in making people believe that the essence of Christianity consists in the belief of doctrines; yet the great currency which that notion obtained, arose exclusively from the *practical* shape in which it was preached. It was not assent to certain propositions, or belief in certain facts, that Christianity was said to demand; but *obedience* to the church, and implicit trust in her doctrines. This is indeed an intelligible demand, which by the assistance of certain texts of Scripture, has been recognized for ages by the great majority of the Christian world. The supposition that Christ had laid this duty upon all his future disciples is not absurd in itself; it is

totally devoid of proof: but of this the mass of Christians are not sufficiently enlightened judges: such a submission is, indeed, much in accordance with the popular notions of religion among mankind; for a religion without a priesthood was scarcely conceived before Christ. But the idea of Christianity consisting pre-eminently of personal belief in, and of real conviction of the truth of certain metaphysical tenets, and certain historical facts,—this conviction, to be grounded on the laws of historical criticism, on the intrinsic validity of certain documents, and the accuracy of their interpretation,—such Christianity, such method of spiritual safety does not, cannot exist as a popular, much less as a universal religion. The mass of people who call themselves, and (I am ready to grant) are Christians in proportion to the sincerity of their wish to live according to their notions of Christ, have no more reason to be convinced of the authenticity of the Bible, than the people of Ephesus had in their day, that the statue of the great Diana had fallen from heaven. Even most of those who have read such works as Paley's (a number, comparatively speaking, very small) cannot be said to believe in consequence of a fair examination of the case: such an examination would require the attentive perusal of the most accredited works of Infidels. Such deliberate, impartial, and attentive hearing of both sides, would be necessary for a well-grounded decision. How then, I will ask, can it be supposed that Christ could have founded his universal religion upon such a basis? The Christian world,—the mass of Christians,—have never conceived anything of the kind; they think it one of their duties to treat the Bible as a book from heaven: this is part of their practical religion. Among Roman Catholics this duty is a branch of obedience to the church; among Protestants an early inculcated habit: but in neither case will the great majority pretend that they have or ought to have a rational ground of conviction.

“(19.) What strange notions of God must lie at the bottom of such systems of Christianity as make eternal happiness depend on an *historical* faith!—an historical faith too, of mira-

culous facts, of facts externally alike to those which, in all other histories out of the Bible, have been long stamped by all sensible historians as pure fables ! I do not mean to rank *all* the miracles of the Bible with the mythico-historical narratives of the early history of every nation ; I only wish the *external* similarity to be remarked ; because, owing to that likeness, consisting of all that strikes the imagination, the work of discriminating and weighing the evidence for a *true* miracle must be confessed to be of the most difficult nature. Nevertheless, this work of thought, and profound research, is supposed to be made the condition of eternal happiness by the good and gracious Father of all mankind. Observe however, the partiality implied in such a system. The difficulty of *historical* conviction is all for the thinking part of mankind ; among whom, miracles become more and more difficult of proof, in proportion as the knowledge of nature on the one hand, and of the character of historical documents on the other increases. Here, however, we are told that this apparent partiality in favour of the “poor and humble,” is the due reward of their moral temper. But the evasion is such, that were it not for the total want of reflection which attends all mysticism of this kind, few would not be ashamed to avow it : for it is obvious, that the advantage in question belongs equally to the mentally indolent, to the mere man of the senses who detests the labour and fatigue of attention. This is practically exhibited every day before our eyes, though not so strikingly and abundantly as it appears in the history of the most brutal and immoral times, the ages of faith and violence, of devotion and profligacy,—the period of chivalry. When did the ‘poor and humble,’ equal the barons and knights of those times in strong unhesitating belief of the Bible, or of any thing which they were told that it was *pious* and Christianlike to believe ? What candid man will deny, that if the main condition of Christianity is unhesitating belief in historical testimony, the kingdom of heaven announced by Christ, belongs as an inheritance to the class of men to whose lot the possession of the earth has

generally fallen ; whilst the purest models of godlike humanity, those in whose composition the highest gifts of God,—intellect and reason,—predominate, must at all times, but especially in our own, and in the fast approaching ages of widely spread thought, belong almost by a natural right to the ‘ devil and his angels.’ This may be broadly expressed, I confess ; but is it not the unvarnished substance of the doctrine maintained by all *articled* churches ; the doctrine to the root, at least, of which, I fear not a few among us still cling, unaware that they do so ?

“(20.) There is indeed only one way of getting safely out of this insecure position. The following question must be thoroughly examined and settled, with a manful and truly Christian indifference to obloquy ; for, that all the consequences of alarming inveterate prejudice will follow from such a bold examination, no one can doubt who knows the nature of superstition. Such, indeed, is its power, that I foresee a difficulty even in making the question which I propose intelligible to persons tainted with the existing *bibliolatry*. But I will do my best to be clear. The question is this :—

“ Is it a Christian’s duty, as such Christian, to receive as true whatever may be proved, by the text of our Bibles, to have been considered as true by the writers, some of whose works are contained in it ? In other words, are we bound as Christians to believe ; first, that the writers of all and each of the books in the Bible were miraculously preserved from all error, or at least, from errors connected with some kind of subjects, which we may clearly distinguish from all other subjects, so that we may be sure of the author’s infallibility when he speaks about them ? 2ndly. Are we bound as Christians to believe with the utmost assurance that the existing books of the Bible are the identical compositions which those writers left to the world, and that no curtailment, addition, or interpolation, has taken place in regard to those books ?

“(21.) Here it will be absolutely necessary as an indispensable previous step, to agree upon some general principles, without establishing which we cannot expect any thing but

pure wrangling. I conceive then, that such an obligation in regard to the Bible should not be proved by *inference*. As I have already suggested, such an obligation cannot be established except by a clear and positive command of God. The existence of such a command should, besides, be made clear by those who contend for the above mentioned obligation. Those who, as myself, deny it, are not bound to prove the *non-existence* of the divine command. The state of the question is, in fact, just the same as that of the infallibility of the Church. The Church must prove its title, not by inference, but positively and directly; he that denies that infallibility is not bound to prove by direct argument, that it has not been granted: the want of a clear title to it, is a sufficient proof.

“(22). I also would demand, as a previous fundamental principle, that no injury to the consequences of the supposed privilege, be alleged as a proof of its existence. I cannot find a more effectual method of making this very important principle appear in a clear light than that of imagining ourselves among the contemporaries of Luther’s Reformation, and considering the impression which arguments similar to those which my rule would exclude, would make upon the generality of the people. We should remember that the whole of that system of religion which we call Popery had grown out of two suppositions: 1st, that the salvation of mankind depended upon acquiescence in certain doctrines, as *true*, and upon the admission of certain historical facts, as *real*: 2nd, that there existed means, suited to the capacity of all men, not to mistake the sense of the books to which those doctrines were believed to have been consigned by God himself, and to prevent all doubt as to the miraculous nature of those books. The main spring of this mighty machinery was the Church, which having been for many centuries at work, had raised a mighty structure, of dogmas and ceremonies, long identified with Christianity in the minds of all people. Habit must, in all such cases, give to the *growth* of the original false assumption, the appearance of a *final end*, while its root,—the gratuitous

assumption,—takes the character of means totally indispensable for the attainment of the imaginary end. Now, under such circumstances, it will always happen that whenever the root of the evil is touched,—whenever its legitimacy is questioned,—no arguments are more popularly conclusive against the objectors than those which go to prove that the system which long custom has consecrated cannot stand without the ground now assailed. There cannot be a doubt that such arguments were the strongest barrier which checked the Reformation. ‘You would make the Church fallible in matters of faith’ (people would say with alarm and indignation), ‘you would question her power to bind and to loose. How then can we be sure that our belief is not heretical; or how can we enjoy a comfortable assurance of the remission of our sins? Observe besides’ (they would continue to object) ‘the innumerable cases in which the Pope’s dispensing power is required: what shall we do without it, in the multitude of complicated events which no law can provide for?’ I cannot conceive any thing more powerful than this reasoning, to excite a general feeling of abhorrence to the Reformation. Whence, I ask, does the fallacy derive its strong power of delusion? From a mere winking the principle, the recognition of which I contend for: the fallacy derives its power from the circumstance that the *growth*, or the consequences of the assailed assumption are regarded as important *final ends*, and the false assumption itself is defended upon the score of its being indispensable for the attainment of those ends. It is perfectly true, whatever the *orthodox* Protestants may say, that without an infallible Church, *salvation* by means of an orthodox creed hangs upon a desperate chance; but, if the notion of a salvation which depends on orthodoxy is the *growth* of hierarchical pretensions ignorantly admitted at first, and subsequently confirmed by superstition, habit, and violence, the objection that if we reject the *infallibility of the Church*, we cannot rest our orthodoxy upon the *infallibility of the Church*, is quite ludicrous. Let us then beware of a similar reasoning respect-



ing the oracular character of the Scriptures. To object that, if the Scriptures are not infallible we cannot have an infallible foundation for our religious creed, is just such an argument as I have stated in favour of Church infallibility. The necessity of infallibility in religion, must first be proved to exist; if this cannot be done, we must not be surprised by the discovery that God has not given us the means of attaining what he has not demanded.

“(25). Exactly of the same logical character is the objection, that such *rationalism*, as I contend for, renders useless all God’s revelations to man. ‘If the Bible’ (it will be said) ‘is to be treated like any other collection of writings, we must at once make up our minds to the melancholy state of being without a direct means of knowing the will of God,—we must acknowledge that we have no advantage over the heathen world.’ Here again the failure of results which were expected upon a false assumption is charged upon those who show that the assumption is groundless. It has been assumed that if the Bible is inspired, mankind are brought by means of it nearer to the Deity than they have been, and must remain, in case such inspiration cannot be proved; but any one who shall show the fallacies upon which the supposition was made, will be sure to be accused of the cruelty and impiety of destroying the only means of direct communication with God. I do not mention this as a peculiar hardship, to which I myself must submit. At all times and in all places he who ventures to disturb a flattering delusion will be described as a wanton aggressor, as an enemy to the happiness of his fellow men. Thank Heaven the frequent and melancholy disappointments which the more civilized part of the world have experienced on such subjects, have opened the eyes of a sufficient number to diminish the danger of those whose unwelcome vocation is to contend with popular delusions.

“(24.) In the present case I might content myself with an appeal to the long and varied experience which shows that the theory of inspiration (especially among Protestants), totally

fails of the results for the sake of which it has been set forth. But I wish to attack the root itself of the delusion. In my view of the subject, even the most direct and personal communication with God of any writer, could not give to his books the power of conveying a *supernatural*, or rather *superrational* conviction to the readers. In establishing this important point, deep prejudice and trembling superstition present the only difficulties with which intellect has to contend. As, for the present, I totally despair of gaining any ground; I shall only point to principles on which men, accustomed to follow reason in spite of imagination, will, I trust, readily agree with me.

“The notion of a certainty above reason,—a *superrational* certainty; I wish to call it,—is so self-contradictory, that it cannot be well conceived by the mind. Yet such a notion is the only foundation of the established *supernaturalism*. With a truly infantine ignorance of man’s mental constitution, people continue to imagine, that no belief can exceed in certainty that which would arise from hearing God himself make a verbal statement of what he wished mankind to hold as unquestionably true. But there is a monstrous misconception at the bottom of this notion; for does it not suppose that God may make himself an object of which our senses may judge? God, I doubt not, can do all things, except what is in contradiction with himself: it is He who has made our senses in such a manner that they can receive only certain kind of impressions,—impressions essentially distinct from every thing mental or spiritual. The supposition then that he would resort to such a medium for a more immediate and more secure communication with man, implies a charge of ignorance of his own works in the great Creator. ‘God is a spirit,’ is the sublime fundamental principle of Christ’s religion. Man too, is in part a spirit; and the communication between the spiritual Creator, and that visible creature of His, who bears the *spiritual* stamp of his likeness, would naturally be expected to be between the two spirits,—the spirit of God, and the spirit in

man. But no : this could not take place except through man's reason ; and that supreme power within us, is said to be too weak, too much exposed to error and delusion. How shall this difficulty be obviated ? How shall God remove uncertainty from his most particular and important communications with man ? ' Let God be seen and heard,' answers the supernaturalist. In vain it is declared (though it scarcely needed a declaration) that ' no man has seen God at any time.' The divine will confidently explain away this assertion, and tell us that God was frequently seen in the time of the Patriarchs, and was distinctly heard by the whole people of Israel. Reason, he tells us, is a deceitful guide : but here, it seems there was no room for mistake,—a mountain was seen in flames,—there was an earthquake,—a trumpet sounded,—and a voice was heard speaking distinctly. Such, we are told, is one of the most remarkable instances of direct communication between God and man, intended to obviate the danger of our being misled by reason, and to establish a certainty in religious matters for all ages and nations to come. This is to be considered a source of certainty above all assurance which could be obtained *spiritually*, or what is the same, *rationally*. But let us see : God spoke : are we sure that God has a voice, or that when a sound like that of the human voice cannot be traced to any man, it must, beyond all doubt, originate in God ? The world has been full of delusions, bearing internal marks very like the communication in question. I will not say that this is a delusion of the same kind as those which are recorded in prophane history ; but the *senses* are subject to delusions : and how can we be *certain* that the witnesses of such manifestations of God through the senses, took every reasonable precaution against mistake ?—But I will not tire you with a minute enumeration of the doubts which inevitably surround a transaction of this kind, as soon as it is consigned to history, in order (it is supposed) to produce a *superrational* conviction, at the distance of an indefinite number of years. It seems quite incredible that such an ignorance of ourselves,

of our faculties, of the grounds of our conviction, as is betrayed in the above supposition, should exist among us! God, in the first place, is asserted to have addressed himself to the external senses of man, distrusting the powers which he had imparted to man's mind. Such, we are told, was the Deity's pre-eminent means of giving us certainty upon things on which our eternal well-being depended. But, it is clear, that all this contrivance of ocular and auricular certainty could reach only those whose eyes and ears were affected at a certain time. The benefit of that supposed certainty was confined to a small number of men, upon a very limited spot. What then is to be the ground of certainty for the millions of millions equally concerned in the subject, who were not present? 'Historical evidence, we are told, is enough for *them*.' But historical evidence, however complete and strong, does not address itself to the senses, which the supernaturalist makes the vehicles of the highest certainty,—certainty above that of which reason is capable. What we and all the rest of mankind except the witnesses of a miracle can examine by means of our senses, are writings which can prove nothing, except by the help and under the approbation of reason. The credibility of the witnesses, the authenticity of the documents, their perfect agreement with the original manuscripts,—are these things objects of sense? Unquestionably not: the blindest enthusiast must confess that reason is here to be the judge; and since its approbation must be at the bottom of the whole process, even the blindest enthusiast, if he still preserves common sense undisturbed in the slightest degree, must confess that the supposed divine contrivance to avoid the fallibility of human reason, has totally failed; and that the originally discarded reason must be the foundation of belief in those miracles which were intended to supersede it in matters, as they are called, of revelation.

“(25.) Verbal revelation and miracles have for ages been treated under the false notion which I have just laid before you. Both have been, most unphilosophically, imagined to

be *evidence* above reason. Such an error would not find admittance even into our nurseries, if a most tyrannical power, supported by the popular errors it creates and cherishes, had not transmitted, through a long series of generations, an inheritance of mental servility, of which hardly our children's children will be totally free. I wish you to imagine what would be the conduct of truly pious and unenthusiastic men, in the present day, if a case of resurrection by miracle was to appear in the public journals. In the first place, there would be an extreme reluctance to pay any serious regard to the statement. Whence, I ask, this reluctance to examine into modern miracles? Surely the evidence adduced for some of the cures of Prince Hohenlohe, is not, *primâ facie*, contemptible. Still, the stoutest believers of the miraculous in the Bible, would, if Protestants, look with a feeling less respectful than pity, on any one, not a Roman Catholic, who should undertake a journey for the purpose of examining the evidence of the alleged miracle upon the spot. This mental fact, this reluctance to give credit to miraculous transactions, and the law of its appearance and growth, are things not to be overlooked in the present question. Bold indeed must be that ignorance which shall attribute it to individual perverseness. Few mental phenomena can be better established, as inseparably connected with our intellectual nature, than the attraction of the miraculous in the infancy of mind, and its repulsiveness for the same mind, instructed and developed. To man, in individual as well as in collective or national childhood, a miracle is evidence to itself; and the more extraordinary the miracle, the greater the certainty, which a mere narrative of it will convey. Ramahoun Roy's experience coincides here most satisfactorily with theory; he has, as I remember, stated somewhere, that Missionaries can produce no impression upon the Hindoos, by means of the Bible miracles. Accustomed to the extravagant magnitude of their own wonders, they smile upon the insignificance of ours. Nor can any one be surprised at this, considering that whatever makes a deep impression

upon the imaginative faculty, is in that state of the human mind taken for absolute reality; consequently the narrative of the miracle, which leaves deeper traces upon the fancy than that of a more modest and unambitious wonder, must indispose the undeveloped mind for a belief in the latter. Such then being the immutable laws of the human understanding, the Eternal Source of those laws, if he intended to guide mankind by *miracles* (and verbal revelation is of that class) not by reason, must have intended two things: First, that the great mass of mankind in a low state of mental development, should follow the most extravagant dreams of enthusiasm and imposture. Secondly, that in proportion as the human mind increased in knowledge, so it would reject the miraculous divine guidance. I have examined this objection to the common theological notions on Revelation and miracles, with the utmost impartiality and attention of which I am capable; I have done so for many years, under a desire of finding it fallacious; for the superstitious fears inspired by my early education, were not easily subdued; but I never could discover even a plausible answer.

“(26.) What I am about to say, is a result of the same inquiry, and by no means one of the concessions which the opponents of religious prejudices frequently make for the sake of allaying the alarm which their too unceremonious approach to the popular idols may have raised. In the course of my examination of verbal revelation and miracles, I have found no convincing reason for denying that God may have, on some occasions, put forth energies which do not belong to the system of regular and invariable forces by which he conducts the phenomena of nature. But I see no ground whatever for believing that such extraordinary instances of *occasional* divine activity, had human belief for their object. If God has at any time acted visibly, either against or beyond the range of the laws which he gave to his creation, he certainly must have done it for the sake of the thing thus performed; and not to give rise to historical or traditional narratives, to be believed

in distant times. Within the narrow limits of the probability which these matters admit, I believe, that, besides that immediate divine energy, attested by the recent existence of man on the face of this globe, the preservation of the parents of mankind, immediately after their formation, was an effect not within the reach of the existing natural laws. Admitting the immediate formation of one or more couples, especially of the lower classes of animals, endowed at once with the instincts which belong to their species, we may well conceive the manner in which they would preserve themselves and propagate their race. But man possesses no such instincts; and, if we imagine one or more couples formed at once, in a state of full development, and then left to themselves, it will not be easy to conjecture by what *natural* means, within the existing laws, they could be preserved. We know how long infants are in learning to see,—to measure distances,—to use their hands,—and to walk. It seems indeed, very probable, that the acquisition of these powers would be still more difficult to a human being, who (by supposition) should have to obtain them when his body had attained full growth. The provision of food for the grown infants, which the fact of creation forces us to admit, must have been made by an individual act of the creating power, since the wonderful means provided by the law of procreation, are totally excluded in the case before us. So far, I am willing to admit, there is a strong *conjectural* ground for the existence of a divine operation, which, like creation itself, may be well ranked as a miracle; yet not a miracle for show (as the etymology of that word implies), but one which might be considered as a personal act out of the reach of the laws, whose operation could not commence but subsequently to that act. In a mental point of view, that is, in relation to the human mind, this conjecture affords a valuable support to the various grounds upon which our race, after having emerged from that low state of intellect, which produces idolatry and anthropomorphism, may, in such ages as the present, preserve

itself from pantheism, or the belief of an impersonal Creator, —a necessarily constructive, but unconscious Deity.

“(27.) In regard to what is called *revelation* (which to avoid ambiguity, I shall define a personal teaching of an individual man by God), I feel confident that the established notions are perfectly untenable. Those notions belong to a period of imperfect development, and as it has been already shown, arise from a gross mistake regarding the nature of belief and of evidence. This has been more or less clearly perceived, even in ages, when the belief in visions and verbal communications from an invisible world, was totally unshaken. We find common sense breaking out, and betraying its first perception of the inadequacy of visions and miracles to establish truth, in the Old Testament itself. Manoah, for instance, insists upon having his own tests applied to the heavenly vision, that he may be sure of the reality of a heavenly message. I cannot at this moment bring to my recollection other instances of the same kind, though I believe they are to be found in the Bible ; but the suspicion of delusion is so natural, so thoroughly grounded in nature, that men appear to be unable to feel secure against it, except when, being cautioned to be upon their guard on that point, superstition makes them at once impenetrable to argument. Hence it is, that in appeals to nature, especially to that nature which is best known to consciousness, (I wish to speak without personal offence,) the very name of theology deprives me of confidence : for theology, as it is studied among us generally, stifles the voice of nature within, and few, even under the most sincere wish to listen to it, can perceive its still small voice, drowned as it is by the loud and harsh cries of authority. It is fortunate indeed, in such a case, to have an attestation from nature herself, through one of her most unprejudiced and distinguished favourites. Hear it then in the following lines :—

‘ The spirit that I have seen  
May be a devil, and the devil hath power



To assume a pleasing shape, yea, and, perhaps,  
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
 (As he is very potent with such spirits)  
 Abuses me to damn me. *I'll have grounds  
 More relative than this.*

The greatest interpreter of nature has given us here, her eternal, immutable answer to the claims of visions and miracles to be the foundations of religious truth. I will not, as I have said of miracles, (for there is no essential difference between the two things in question,) I will not assert that God has never used some extraordinary impressions on the senses, as means of drawing attention to important truths, or rather, of inclining the will of the rude and unthinking multitude to follow the dictates of those whom he had endowed with the high moral and intellectual qualities, which *truly* distinguish his messengers for good to man. But in matters of truth

‘I’ll have grounds  
 More relative than this.’

The only safe grounds are those essentially connected with the truth to be received. That all external phenomena, all impressions on the senses, are *irrelative* to spiritual truth, is proved by the crowd of impressions *deemed miraculous* which the successive generations which have peopled, and at this moment inhabit, this globe, make their ground for belief in the most monstrous errors. Let us, my dear friend, have *grounds more relative* for what we embrace as pure Christianity.

“(28.) And it is very remarkable, that all thinking men, however prepossessed in favour of miraculous evidence, look for proofs *more relative* to the truths in which they feel a deep interest. This appears in the unconcern with which they treat all miracles alleged against their settled belief. Now, if their reason were thoroughly satisfied that miracles are the most unquestionable stamp of divine communications, honest men would not be so inconsistent as to turn away disdainfully from

modern miracles ; nay, they would take sufficient pains to weigh the evidence of the miracles which support the unhesitating religious belief of other sects, and other nations. Let the supernaturalist be just upon such an important point ; let him put aside that national pride, and that more extended though weaker pride of race, which stand to him in lieu of examination for his comfortable conviction that all miracles but the Jewish and Christian, are totally unworthy of attention. A man whose religious belief is founded upon the intrinsic and rational worth of what he embraces as such,—he who is perfectly convinced that what most concerns every individual man, must have been placed by the great Creator within the reach of our mind, if it but honestly wish to exert its faculties,—such a man may justly turn a deaf ear to those who call him to examine the various and reciprocally opposed collections of miraculous evidence, ancient and modern ; for he is convinced that God has not appointed that kind of evidence for those at least, to whom he has not addressed it in itself and originally : but it is most unreasonable, not to say arrogant, in those who contend that miraculous evidence, *reduced to testimony*, is the direct and the highest proof of revealed truth, to sit down contentedly in their own corner of the world, closing their eyes to all other evidence of the same kind. Protestants of this description are bound, at the least, to go to Rome, and examine the detailed evidence of thousands of miracles, proved to the satisfaction of a board of cardinals, who pass judgment in conformity with a previously established code of laws. Many a smile, and many a scowl too, will be raised on hearing this invitation ; but what will the smilers and the scowlers say to a similar answer from a follower of Mahomet, or of Brahma, on their being invited to examine the miraculous evidence of the Bible ? I, for one, well know what my address would be on such occasion. I would desire the Mahometan, the Hindoo, and all others, to reflect on the view of religion which I myself call Christianity,—to compare it with his national religion, and judge between the two. If he appealed to

the wonders exhibited in past ages, I would tell him that, in my relative ignorance of Oriental history and total unacquaintance with the language of the documents adduced as the testimony of ocular witnesses of his national miracles, I could not judge their value and weight. I would mention the Christian Scriptures, and my just confidence in their intrinsic value, just to make him perceive the analogy of our respective situations in regard to the written testimony of past ages. From the certainty of this analogy, from the obviously insuperable difficulty of his transforming himself into a European scholar, or my becoming a learned Pundit, in good time for making up our minds on the respective value of our traditional evidence of miracles, I hope I could infer satisfactorily for a reasonable man of any nation whatever, that God cannot have made our happiness depend upon the settlement of such a question. Having conjured away that disturbing mental phantom, the rest of the examination could not fail to be both improving and satisfactory to any couple of upright men, whatever might be their respective conclusions at the end of the conference.

“(29.) Is this *Rationalism*, or is it already rank infidelity,—a formal renunciation of all revelation? I confess I am perfectly indifferent to the name by which others may choose to express the simple fact that they do not agree with me. But I am far from being indifferent to the removal of dark and un-social prejudices, when there is a chance left of my being heard on these important subjects. I wish, therefore, to request the serious attention of men not totally blinded by the spirit of orthodoxy, to a passage in the Old Testament which clearly proves the inferior value, as evidence, which Moses, or whoever was the writer of the book of Deuteronomy, sets on miracles. The too common practice of talking a great deal of the inspiration of the Old Testament, whilst by some it is read in detached passages merely as a charm, and in total indifference to the sense; and by others it is kept as much as possible out of view, in order to avoid the disturbance which, if read attentively, it never fails to produce in the minds of thinking

persons,—this practice alone is the cause of the general notion that the Bible lays the ultimate foundation of religion on miracle. The following passage deserves deliberate attention : it is in the 15th chapter of Deuteronomy :—

“ ‘If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them ; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or of that dreamer of dreams : for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him, and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death.’ ”

“ This *rationale* of miraculous evidence deserves a degree of consideration from those who conceive *revelation* to depend on miracles, which they certainly have not bestowed upon it. It discloses something very extraordinary relating to God, but, at the same time, most important in regard to miraculous evidence. According to this oracular writer, God, after having established a religion by miracles, may happen to assist false prophets in the performance of really miraculous works,—or, at least, may connive at the production of signs and wonders perfectly undistinguishable from miracles, with a view to try whether a people’s belief in their religion is proof against that same kind of evidence which made them embrace it. Now the question occurs : Did the Jews act upon this *revealed* command in regard to Christ ? Unless they were accustomed to read the Old Testament like most divines amongst us, they could not have overlooked a law so obviously applicable to the miracles of Jesus and his apostles. Yet either the Christian documents have suppressed the very perplexing argument which this passage offered to the Scribes and Pharisees, or both Christ and his learned contemporaries must have been

aware of the inherent and intrinsic weakness of miraculous evidence. There are, indeed, in the Gospels deeply marked traces of Christ's dislike to the popular notions regarding miracles : the genuineness of the passages in which Jesus reproves the Jews for their determination not to believe him except on the ground of miraculous exhibitions, becomes unquestionable, when we consider that those speeches are preserved by men who fully partook of the popular notions in favour of miraculous proofs of doctrine, of men who evidently did not understand the meaning of such sayings, nor their inconsistency with the abundance of miracles found in their narratives. But I leave those who *ground* their Christianity on miracles and inspired books, to grapple with these difficulties. One thing after all is evident,—that the Bible itself is not *decidedly* in favour of the notion that the *miraculous* can be the ultimate proof of a divine revelation. As to Christ himself, a conviction that miracles must be the credentials of an extraordinary messenger from God, is totally inconsistent with his reproof to the Jews,—‘ except you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.’ If we follow up the consequences of the commonly established notions on this subject, the Jews were perfectly right in not believing except under that condition. But, in justice to them, it must be acknowledged that not even the clearest miracles could relieve them from a most distressing perplexity ; the book of Deuteronomy excludes all miraculous evidence in regard to the Jews themselves, and condemns the miracle worker to death. The Jew was bound to continue what he was in regard to religion, even if heaven and earth obeyed the voice of a reforming prophet : the sun might rise in the west, and the seasons change their succession at his command. The Jew,—the faithful, orthodox Jew,—would not be moved at such signs, for he had the highest authority to believe ‘ *that the Lord his God was proving him.*’ Such was his clear duty, according to the Law, even when the miracles were worked before his eyes. What then can be expected

from the conscientious Israelite of our own times, who has only miracles *in writing* to convince him?

“(30.) What then, I shall be asked, can prove a revelation from heaven?—I know nothing that can prove it except the thing revealed. How the glorious thoughts, pregnant with blessings to mankind, were imparted by the Father of lights ‘at sundry times and in divers manners,’ but especially ‘in these last days’ to his greatest messenger, Christ,—whether those thoughts arose according to the established laws of mind, or were breathed, together with a vivifying moral spirit, into the souls of the divine messengers, we have not means to ascertain; all that we are enabled to do is to appreciate the value of the message itself. Revelation is precious because it communicates *truth*. Gold might be miraculously drawn from the bowels of the earth, but its miraculous origin could not raise its standard when put into circulation with other gold. The wisdom of God, I doubt not, has, in mercy to mankind, chosen instructors, whom, by means known to God alone, he has enabled to do for the world, what, as far as we can judge, would be out of the power of any individual unsupported by a peculiar divine assistance. Among the benefactors of mankind, I cannot find any one to compare to Jesus of Nazareth. But if mankind cannot be benefitted by the truths he taught, except through an *historical* conviction that those truths were miraculously known, and miraculously proved, the truly divine mission of Christ is doomed to remain without any thing like an adequate result. Millions of men may continue to call themselves Christians, but with no more reason than they would be called Mahometans, if chance had united that name with the circumstances of their birth and education. Unless Christianity be what men, all over the world, may *rationally* accept as soon as education shall have awakened their *conscientious reason*,—that faculty which judges between moral evil and good,—unless Christianity can be preached to the *poor* without the assistance either of enthusiasm, or of *historical* and *critical* proofs, we are forced to conclude that

either Christ mistook the nature of his own religion, or that his followers have perfectly disqualified it to answer the purpose of universality for which he intended it. I know that it will be said that the great mass of mankind are very imperfect judges of moral truth. I answer that there is a still greater mass, who are much less qualified to judge of historical truth. I cannot conceive how the idea that Christianity must derive all its efficacy as *history*, can maintain its hold on any mind tolerably acquainted with the character of historical testimony. Historical testimony in support of events analogous to those with which a universal experience acquaints us is above the judgment of the generality of people. None but thoroughly educated men, who have paid a particular attention to historical criticism, can properly estimate the authority of the documents from which the history of England, for instance, or of France is derived. How strange then is the supposition, that every one who calls himself a Christian is capable of understanding the reasons upon which it is asserted, that the existing historical testimony to the reality of the Bible miracles is sufficient! An ingenious answer has been lately given to this difficulty, by my excellent friend Dr. H \* \* \*, who says, ‘that it is enough for the mass of the people to know that the authenticity of the Christian documents has stood the attacks of the unbelieving writers.’ But how do they know this, except through the controversionalists on their own side? How can they be sure, that while the law of the land threatens with severe punishment any one who in a publication should conclude against the authenticity of any considerable part of the Bible, there are not many among those on whose authority they rely, who secretly believe that the German critics of the Rationalist school (as they are called) have had the best of the argument! I cannot conceive how any unprejudiced person to whom the difficulties of historical proof are known, can deliberately assert, that the great mass of mankind of all countries and ages can receive Christianity upon historical grounds; especially, if upon such grounds it be their duty

to believe in the miracles both of the Old and the New Testament !

I have, my dear friend, been writing on, day by day, and only for a very short period each time, for my health has been, and continues much worse than usual. I fear, therefore, that you will find it difficult to collect any clear and distinct general notion from the rambling thoughts which I have already consigned to this letter ; as my strength does not allow me to recast it, and reduce what I have said into one clear and distinct view, I must take the liberty of sending to you this rather loose collection of notes, requesting your attentive consideration of them individually. It is of great importance to ascertain whether these objections to some deeply rooted notions which exist among all denominations of Christians are as valid as I think, or not. [The only method by which we can arrive at a perfect knowledge of the object of Providence in the unquestionably great work which began with our era, and has uninterruptedly proceeded up to the moment when, in consequence of the moral impulse then given to a great portion of mankind, I am anxiously exerting myself on the subject of Christianity,—the only way to complete the Reformation which Luther proclaimed, is to remove, one by one, every false notion which we may find connected with the profession of the gospel.] While employed in the removal of individual errors, we should be upon our guard against the usual bugbear, ‘where shall we stop?’—‘what will be left?’ When we shall have removed what is positively *not* Christianity, then, and not till then, shall we be able to perceive what *true* Christianity is.

Ever, with sincere affection,

Your friend and brother,

J. BLANCO WHITE.

THE REV. JAMES MARTINEAU.



## N O T E S,

§c.

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### NOTES TO LECTURE I.

NOTE 1. "*More than Clement and Barnabas, who are excluded.*"—  
Page 7.

WITHOUT entering upon the intricate question respecting the origin of the first records of Christianity, and the relation of apocryphal to canonical writings, it may be safely affirmed, that no one, at all acquainted with the discussions to which they have led, can maintain the broad distinction,—the distinction between inspiration and imposture,—commonly conceived to separate the received from the rejected books. The external arguments usually adduced, to support the authority of our present sacred writings, are reducible to two: the simple antiquity of the books, attested by quotations from them, and references to them, in ecclesiastical authors of the third and second centuries: and the ascription of authority exclusively to them, by the writers and the Catholic churches of the same period. The former of these evidences may certainly be claimed for more than one of the apocryphal books: for Epiphanius supposes "the Gospel of Cerinthus," and Jerome "the Gospel according to the Egyptians," to be of the number of those alluded to by Luke in the preamble to his Gospel. And the latter of these arguments, whatever weight it may have *for* the received Scriptures, will not be held conclusive *against* the books now rejected and lost, by those who consider, *on what principles* the church writers awarded their preference to certain works, and their reproaches to others. Instead of dissenting from doctrines because contained in apocryphal books, they threw away books as apocryphal, because they contained obnoxious doctrine. Every thing which opposed the views of the orthodox or dominant party, was to be put down; and the use of a Gospel by an heretical (*i. e.*, unsuccessful) sect was sufficient reason for reviling and rejecting it. For an admirable estimate of the testimony of "the Fathers," respecting points of this kind, see "Second Travels of an Irish Gentleman in Search of a Religion," by Rev. J. Blanco White, vol. I., chap vii.

Note 2. "*By the murmurs and restlessness of imbecile rage.*"—Page 8.

Luke vi. 6—11. The account of this transaction by Matthew and Mark has a much less vivid impress of truth and nature : see Matt. xii. 9—14 ; Mark iii. 1—6. If the enemies of Christ entertained a desire to entrap him, by taking advantage of a Sabbath cure, it is surely not likely that they would themselves broach the subject (as Matthew represents), and put him on his guard, by directly asking his opinion about the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath. Luke's account, which exhibits our Lord, as himself observing their silent curiosity on the subject, and starting the disputed question in a form which could not but perplex them, is more probable. See Schleiermacher's Critical Essay on the Gospel of St. Luke, in loc.

Note 3. "*From the different positions of the observers.*"—Page 9.

The calling of the first Apostles (Andrew, Peter ; James, and John) is recorded in the following passages of the several Evangelists : Matt. iv. 18—22 ; Mark i. 16—20 ; Luke v. 10, 11 ; John i. 37—end. In comparing these accounts, several discrepancies present themselves, with respect to both the place and the order of the transactions.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the scene is by the Lake of Galilee.

In John, the scene is in Judæa : the calls in Galilee being, according to this Evangelist, those of Philip and Nathanael, who are not mentioned in the other Gospels.

Matthew and Mark represent the two pairs of brothers as *successively* called ; first Andrew and Peter ; then, after a short interval, James and John.

Luke makes no mention of Andrew, and represents the others as called *simultaneously*.

John represents Andrew as called with himself (for the nameless one can be no other) ; and Peter as subsequently called through the instrumentality of his brother Andrew. Of James he is silent. It is obvious that this account is entitled to the greatest degree of respect.

The casting of the demons into the swine is narrated in Matt. viii. 28—34 ; Mark v. 1—20 ; Luke viii. 26—39.

According to Matthew, *two* demoniacs were cured ; according to Mark and Luke, only *one*. Paulus and Schleiermacher suppose that the notion of plurality was derived from the "*Legion*" of demons, and the plural form into which this fancy of the maniac threw the dialogue. The silence of Matthew respecting the *number of demons* renders highly probable this explanation of his *number of men*.

According to Luke, a considerable delay ensued between Christ's command that the cure should take place, and its actual occurrence ; Matthew conveys the idea that the cure followed instantly on the command.

Matthew's narrative implies, that our Lord explicitly sanctioned the belief of a positive transference of demons from the maniacs to the swine, and himself claimed in this event a two-fold miracle ; first, the cure of the maniac ;

then, the maddening of the swine. Luke relieves us from the anxieties of the latter half of this pretension; in his narrative, Jesus himself asserts no other miracle than the simple cure: all the rest may be an unauthorized inference of the bystanders, suggested by a loss of some portion or the whole of the herd, simultaneously with the restoration of the madman. If indeed the man had implored Christ to send the evil spirits into the swine, and the destruction of the animals had instantly followed, the coincidence would perhaps have been too remarkable to lie within the probable range of natural causes. But it does not appear that the man preferred any such request. It is indeed said (Luke viii. 32,) "*they* (*i. e.* the devils) besought him, that he would suffer them to enter into them" (the swine); but that these words describe a petition from the lips of the man, is an assumption not only unauthorized, but plainly discouraged by the whole context. Wherever the man takes part in the dialogue, (v. 28—30,) he is spoken of and he speaks of himself, in his own proper person, in the singular number; *e. g.* "*he* saw Jesus;" "*he* cried out;" "*what have I* to do with thee," "*I* beseech thee, torment *me* not;" "*he* said, 'Legion.'" The writer, by abandoning this form of expression in v. 31, 32, indicates that he is no longer describing any speech of the maniac; but a petition, which he supposes the demons themselves to convey to their vanquisher; and which, passing between superhuman spirits and the mind of Christ, would be necessarily secret, imperceptible to the senses of bystanders, and discoverable only by inference from the incident that followed. I admit, that in Luke iv. 33, 34, we have an instance, in which a maniac personates the evil spirits supposed to possess his body; but such personation, however natural in the frenzied speech of the lunatic, appears inadmissible in the sober narrative of the historian.

Note 4. "*For instruction in righteousness.*"—Page 15.

The remark on the translation of this celebrated verse is not intended to impugn the grammatical correctness of the Common Version. If indeed the authority of the Syriac, Vulgate, and Arabic versions, and of several early ecclesiastical writers were sufficient to justify the rejection of the *καὶ* which separates *θεόπνευστος* and *ὀφέλιμος*, the common rendering would be inadmissible. But since by the general suffrage of manuscripts we must decide on the retention of the particle, the two translations are *critically* on a par; and our preference of the one to the other must be determined by considerations purely exegetical. The most plausible objection to the rendering, which for reasons that were satisfactory to Grotius, Baxter, and others, I have adopted, is this:—that the word "*also*" appears to have no force in the passage, which would indeed be improved, rather than injured, by its omission. The function of this little word is to note the introduction of some *additional idea*: and if we conceive the Apostle to say, that "all divinely inspired scripture is *also* (*i. e.* in addition to its quality of inspiration) profitable," &c., his sentiment assumes the tameness of a truism or an anticlimax. Paul

would hardly think it worth his while to announce respecting any writings, that they are not only from God, but, moreover, useful.

This objection (which it is surprising that orthodox commentators have not more frequently urged) appears to me conclusive against any view of the passage, which represents the Apostle, in his description of certain sacred books, as enumerating their excellencies in this order: 1st, their Divinity; 2nd, their utility.—Yet this view has been taken, I believe, by all who have adopted the altered translation. By embracing within our consideration the 13th, 14th, and 15th verses, a different distribution of the author's sentiments at once presents itself: v. 13.

I.—He speaks of certain selfish impostors, who will do mischief by misleading the ignorant from the simplicity of the Christian faith.

II.—With the credulity of these victims of deception, he contrasts the stability of Timothy's mind, well prepared against such seduction;

1. By the knowledge that Paul himself, the greatest living missionary of Christ, had been his instructor: v. 14.

2. By his early familiarity with such of the Hebrew scriptures, as were able to prepare him wisely for the religion of the Gospel,—to light his path of entrance into the peace and security of Christianity: v. 15.

Then having mentioned the importance of these writings to the *personal* faith of Timothy, as an individual, Paul proceeds (v. 16,) to affirm their *additional* importance to the *public efficiency* of his pupil, as a professed teacher of the Gospel among the Jews: and this I conceive to be the idea introduced by the word *also*: all divinely inspired scriptures are useful, *not only* as supports of your own faith, but *also* as instruments for convincing others. The order, therefore, in which the qualities of the sacred books alluded to are enumerated, is not, 1st, their Divinity; 2ndly, their utility: but, 1st, their usefulness to the individual disciple; 2ndly, their usefulness to the public instructor.

If then the amended translation truly expresses the meaning of the Apostle, he attempts to decide nothing respecting what books are divinely inspired; but simply points out the uses to which any books, shown to be inspired, may be applied. It is true that he could not have written the passage, if he had not held, that there were *some* writings for which this character might be claimed: and if we proceed to determine by conjecture, what writings were in his thoughts, we cannot be at any loss for probabilities to guide us. The only parts of the Hebrew scriptures to which Paul's description applies,—the only parts which could preserve in Timothy, and create in others, a belief that Jesus was the Messiah—were obviously those which had supported the expectation of a Messiah, viz., the prophetic books. These writings constituted the great store-house of arguments, to which the missionaries of the Gospel had recourse in reasoning with Jews: and the instances are very few in which appeal is made, by Christ or his Apostles, to any other portion of the Old Testament, except the Book of Psalms. Historical facts are indeed alluded

to, which are recorded in the Israelitish annals ; but no authority is ascribed to these annals, beyond that which attaches to ordinary fidelity in narration.

The opinion of the Apostle cannot, then, be cited, except in favour of the prophetic writings. And the sense in which he understood these to be inspired, was probably very different from that in which modern theologians repeat the same affirmation. The whole extent of his doctrine we may conceive to have been expressed by the Apostle Peter, (2 Pet. i. 21) : " Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man ; but holy men of God *spoke*, moved by the Holy Spirit ;"—that those also who recorded these *speeches*, *wrote* by the Holy Spirit,—that in addition to the superhuman message, there was a superhuman report of it, is a notion of which no trace can be found in the apostolic writings. The whole amount, therefore, of Paul's doctrine is, that the Prophets had a præternatural knowledge of future events ; and that their communications were recorded in the prophetic books. By the admission of these points, the theory of *inspired composition* obviously gains nothing.

In defence of the meaning which I have assigned, in the Lecture, to *Θεόπνευστος*, I have only to refer to Schleusner, who enumerates poets among the persons to whom it may be applied. I shall probably be reminded, however, of the technical distinction which divines have established between " classical " and " theological " inspiration ;—and shall be asked, whether it must not be of the latter that the Apostle speaks. The distinction is altogether artificial and deceptive. It describes, not *two meanings of the word* inspiration, but *two very different receptions which we give* to its claims. When the writers of Greece or Rome intimate the pretensions of a poet, a Pythoness, or an augur to divine influence, and when the Israelites affirm the inspiration of their Prophets, the two claims are identical ; both parties mean the same thing, viz., that the sentiments and feelings of their great national authorities have a superhuman origin : and the only difference (except that which attends the Polytheistic nature of one religion and the Monotheistic of the other) is, that we reject the first claim, and admit the second. And if we adopt the same signification of such phrases in classical and in Hebrew writings, is it not probable that in both they meant, neither quite so little as we ascribe to them in Pagan authors, nor quite so much as theologians extract from them in the Bible ? They ascribe, indeed, a *Providential* origin to certain ideas ; but in times and countries not enjoying much scientific cultivation, the distinction between the natural and the miraculous cannot be understood with any exactitude ; nor will that, which is simply *providential in its effects* be discriminated with precision, from that which is *supernatural in its cause*. An interpreter who assigns to this consideration its proper weight, while he avoids melting away the Apostle's meaning into the supposed " classical " sense of inspiration, will not harden it into the rigid form of the " theological."

Note 5. "*Experience in their noble and holy office.*"—Page 16.

No passages are more frequently adduced to prove the unlimited inspiration of the Apostles, than the two, the true interpretation of which the foregoing passage is intended to suggest. And certainly an influence that should literally "teach them *all things*,"—"bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had said to them,"—"guide them into *all truth*,"—"show them things to come," would amount to the gift of universal infallibility. But the very strength of the expressions, so obviously hyperbolic, far from encouraging, absolutely forbids any such construction. Understand them literally, and they prove too much. The most orthodox upholder of the apostolic inspiration will not maintain that the twelve knew "*all things*," and were in possession of "*all truth*."—Some limitation then is inevitable. The promise is not all-comprehensive. There will be little hesitation in excluding from it subjects of physical, chemical, physiological, and metaphysical inquiry; that Paul was not acquainted with the Law of Gravitation, nor Peter with the Atomic Theory, will be readily admitted. We must further proceed to restrict their acquaintance with whatsoever things Christ had said to them; for they differ in their accounts of his discourses. And that they had foreknowledge of the "things to come," even within the limits of their own personal history is contradicted by Paul's assertion, that he went from city to city, "knowing nothing," but that everywhere "bonds and afflictions awaited him." Where is this exclusion of topics from the range of inspiration to stop? What title must be shown, in order that a subject may retain undisturbed possession? By what rule must we fix the line of demarkation, on one side of which every thing is infallible. The usual answer is, that the Apostles' inspiration extended to every subject, with which it befitted their mission that they should be familiar.—And then the theologian proceeds to state the matters, of which *he thinks* the Twelve ought not to have been ignorant; that is, he tells us what inspiration he would have given, if the decision had been in his hands. It is evident that by this means we make no approach to the solution of our historical question, but gain only a list of learned opinions about the fitness of things.—One divine cannot conceive it to be proper that St. Peter should misunderstand a Psalm; another feels a repugnance to the idea that St. Paul could err in logic; a third entertains insuperable objections to St. James having expected to witness a personal return of Christ to this world: and upon no other evidence than the private feelings of individuals, one class of ideas after another is invested with the dignity of inspiration, or deprived of it. To say, it was fit that on certain topics the Apostles should be unerring; therefore they were so; is a species of reasoning, from a supposed propriety to an actual fact, which is altogether inadmissible. If fitness is to be the test of inspiration, what is to be the test of fitness? The whole advantage of inspiration disappears under the operation of this rule. Its peculiar function is, to communicate truths inappreciable by our natural faculties: but if, before we can be assured of its existence, we are to find out what truths are fit to be communicated, we have

already performed for ourselves the very office in which it proposes to aid us ; and instead of appreciating a statement, because we hold it to be inspired, we hold that it is inspired, because we appreciate it.

The difficulty of laying down any rule for determining the extent of the Apostle's inspiration, seems to recommend strongly a cautious interpretation of our Lord's promises on the subject of their future lot. If by the "Holy Spirit" which was to be their supporter or comforter, we understand their Divine Commission (including the miraculous powers, and such occasional communications as that which sent Peter to Cornelius,) all the demands of our Lord's concluding discourse appear to be satisfied. No preternatural influence upon the understanding is promised ; and the *natural* operation of their mission was sufficient to produce all the enlightening effects, of which Christ speaks in the passages under consideration. It "guided them into all the truth,"—it "taught them all things" which their Lord had found them yet unable to bear, such as the calling of the Gentiles and the abrogation of the Law : it brought to their remembrance "whatsoever things Christ had said," in reference to these topics, and which, at the time, had made no impression, because their import had not been comprehended. It "showed them,"—expounded to them,—"(things to come," events which, while Christ was speaking, were approaching, viz., his death, resurrection, and ascension ; and which, until their effects began to develope themselves, would remain a mystery to the bewildered disciples.

## NOTES TO LECTURE II.

Note 1. "*Till they have received the Papal sanction.*"—Page 23.

A marked caution may be observed in recent Roman Catholic writers in this country, when they speak on the subject of infallibility. Nevertheless, the view which I have given of the doctrine of their church on this point, will be found to receive the sanction of their most discreet representative, Mr. Charles Butler : "Every ecclesiastical cause," he says, "may be brought to him (the Pope) as the last resort, by appeal ; he may promulgate definitions and formularies of faith to the universal church ; and when the general body, or a great majority of her prelates, have assented to them either by formal consent or tacit assent, all are bound to acquiesce in them. 'Rome,' they say, in such a case, 'has spoken, and the cause is determined.' " In explaining the difference between the Transalpine and Cisalpine opinions on the question of Papal prerogative, Mr. Butler states, that the advocates of the former "ascribe to the Pope the extraordinary prerogative of personal infallibility, when he undertakes to issue a solemn decision on any point of faith. The Cisalpines affirm, that in spirituals the Pope is subject in doctrine and discipline to the Church,

and to a general council, representing her ; that he is subject to the canons of the church, and cannot, except in an extreme case, dispense with them ; that even in such a case his dispensation is subject to the judgment of the Church ; that the bishops derive their jurisdiction from God himself immediately, and not derivatively through the Pope.”—“They affirm that a general council may without, and even against the Pope’s consent, reform the church. They deny his personal infallibility, and hold that he may be deposed by the church, or a general council for heresy or schism ; and they admit, that in an extreme case, where there is a great division of opinion, an appeal lies from the Pope to a future general council.” It is obvious from this statement that the Cisalpinians transfer the infallibility, which they withhold from the Pope “personally” to the general council of Bishops who “derive their jurisdiction from God himself immediately.”—Bock of the Roman Catholic Church, Letter X. 6.

The Fathers of both the Greek and Latin churches speak in very magnificent terms of the inspiration of councils.

Symeon Stylites, the renowned ascetic, who, not content with eclipsing all rivals in achievements of fasting and seclusion, crowned his virtues by chaining himself to a rock for seven years, and living at the top of a pillar for thirty more, wrote a letter to the emperor Leo in behalf of the council of Chalcedon. The letter was composed about A.D. 460, and is preserved by Evagrius Scholasticus. The council of Chalcedon (the fourth general council) was held A.D. 451, for the purpose of rescinding all the acts of another of these inspired assemblies previously held at Ephesus ; and in order to settle whether the nonsense of Flavianus, or that of Eutyches, respecting the number of natures in Christ, should be the orthodox essential to quiet in this world, and salvation in the next. The Ephesian convention (called by theological courtesy “the synod of robbers,”) had manifested so holy a zeal for the Eutychian jargon, that Flavianus died of the blows which he there received from episcopal fists. The council of Chalcedon deposed and exiled his enemies. Of this assembly Symeon Stylites says : “In my declared attachment to the faith of the six hundred and thirty holy fathers assembled at Chalcedon, I take my stand upon an actual revelation by the Holy Spirit : for if the Saviour is present among two or three gathered in his name, is it conceivable, that among holy fathers, so numerous and eminent, the Divine Spirit should not be present throughout ?” —Evagr. Hist. Eccles. II. 10.

Note 2. “*Passive vehicles, no doubt, of wisdom not their own.*”—Page 24.

The words of Socrates are these : *νυκτομαχίας τε οὐδὲν ἀπέιχε τὰ γινόμενα. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀλλήλους ἐφαίνοντο νοοῦντες, ἀφ’ ὧν ἀλλήλους βλασφημεῖν ὑπελάμβανον.*—Hist. Eccles. i. 23.

Note 3. “*Mists and marshes of human corruption.*”—Page 24.

For many admirable observations on ecclesiastical councils, see Jortin’s



"Remarks on Ecclesiastical History," vol I. p. 31. seqq. The contentions which disgraced these assemblies appear in some of the Fathers, to have wholly extinguished the belief in their infallibility. Gregory Nazianzen, at least, in the following passage, declines the honour of participating in their inspiration: "To say the truth, I have made up my mind to shun all conventions of bishops; for never did I know one that had any useful end, and did not occasion an aggravation instead of a diminution of ills. For the wranglings and rivalry which they excite (and you must not think that I mean to be offensive in saying it) pass all the powers of description."—Epist. 55, Procopio. 42. In a letter to another correspondent, he avows the same intention: "I am sick of struggling against the jealousies of holy bishops, who render harmony impossible, and make light of the interests of the faith in the pursuit of their own quarrels. For this reason I have resolved (as the saying is) to try a new tack, and to gather myself up, as they say the nautilus does, when it feels the storm; to gaze from afar at others buffeted and buffetting, intent myself on the peace of heaven."\*—Epist. 65, Philagrio, 59. Notwithstanding the frequency with which the evidence of this Father has been appealed to against ecclesiastical councils, to some of my readers, his poetical testimony on this subject may be unknown; the four most remarkable lines may be thus loosely rendered—

"Nay ask me not; I'll never sit  
Where geese and cranes in uproar fight.  
Detected shame, and hate, and strife,  
Assembled there, offend my sight."

Carm. x. 91.

Note 4. "'The greatest and most ancient and illustrious church,' and ascribing to it a 'superior headship.'"—Page 31.

The whole passage of Irenæus, in which these phrases are found, is thus translated by the author of the "Travels of an Irish Gentleman in Search of a Religion:"—"We can enumerate those bishops, who were appointed by the Apostles and their successors down to ourselves, none of whom taught or even knew the wild opinions of these men (heretics). However, as it would be tedious to enumerate the whole list of successions, I shall confine myself to that of *Rome, the greatest, and most ancient, and most illustrious Church*, founded by the glorious Apostles Peter and Paul; receiving from them her doctrine, which was announced to all men, and *which, through the successions of her bishops, is come down to us*. Thus we confound all those who, through evil designs, or vain glory, or perverseness, teach what they ought not; for, to this Church, on account of its superior headship, every other must have recourse, that is, the faithful of all countries; in which Church has been preserved the doctrine delivered by the Apostles."—Iren. adv. Hæres. lib. iii. quoted in Travels, &c. vol. I. p. 30.

\* It is impossible to render, without spoiling, the beautiful phrase, τὰ ἐκεῖσε, "the things yonder."

Note 5. "*The silly credulity of Epiphanius, the implacable fury of Tertullian, the frantic bigotry of Jerome.*"—Page 33.

The peculiar position which these and other ecclesiastical writers hold, as the chief, and often the only, historical authorities of their times, has interfered scarcely less than theological prejudice itself, with the settlement of their real claims to respect. To justify the epithets which I have applied to them is only too easy: the following gleanings from their writings may serve to give the English reader an idea of these sainted men.

In his account of the Ebionites, Epiphanius introduces a biographical notice of a personal friend of his, named Joseph, a convert to Christianity from Judaism. The narrative is so illustrative of this Father's amusing credulity, that were it not for its length, and the odious character of one of its episodes, I would present it entire to the reader. The object of the memoir is, to set forth the virtues of Joseph, and record the wonders of his conversion. Yet so great is the simplicity of the pious Father, that his friend's memory profits less by his eulogy, than it suffers from his statement of facts. For Joseph appears (as will be seen by the following narrative) to have been singularly unsusceptible of Divine illumination: and though, while he was tithe-proctor among the Hebrews, he was favoured with four personal interviews with Christ, and, by the power of Jesus, delivered from two dangerous maladies, and enabled to work a signal miracle,—he still continued a perverse disciple of Moses, till a sound beating from some Jews whom he had offended in the exercise of his unpopular calling, a half-drowning in the river Cydnus, an introduction to the Emperor Constantine, and a lucrative office under his administration, opened his eyes to the truth.

He was originally one of the assistant officers of the Jewish patriarch Ellel at Tiberias: and it was at the death-bed of that venerable person, that his attention was first called to the Christian faith. The dying man sent for a physician: and fortunately, at least for his soul, a Christian bishop appeared, to perform the duties of medical attendant; for, under the guise of a lotion, he received the holy water; and escaped from the phials, both of medicine and of wrath, by swallowing the episcopal mysteries. From this scene of pious simulation all attendants were excluded: but Joseph, who appears to have been of an inquisitive turn of mind, applied his eye to a crevice in the door: and beholding among the mysteries within, a quantity of gold by no means inconsiderable pass from Ellel's hands to the bishop's, he became exceedingly troubled in conscience about his continued alienation from the faith of the Gospel. This uneasiness was increased when, after the patriarch's death, he surreptitiously broke open the ecclesiastical treasury chest, which Ellel had kept sealed in his chamber, and found that the gold, though all gone, had only made room for what the good bishop had justly regarded as exceeding all price,—a copy of the Gospel of John, and the Acts of the Apostles. The office of Hebrew Patriarch was hereditary: and the son of Ellel, being very young, was committed to the guardianship of Joseph, with others, till the

age of pupilage should expire. The life of his dissipated ward providentially carried on the guardian's prepossessions in favour of Christianity. For he observed with astonishment, that while his own discipline and exhortations failed to check the young man's career of vice, the magical power of Christ's name and of the sign of the cross defeated his profligate designs, and supernaturally protected Christian virtue from his hateful seductions. These impressions, however, not being sufficient to effect his conversion, our Lord himself appeared to him, and claimed his faith. The vision was unsuccessful, —even when renewed in a period of extreme illness, and accompanied with a promise of recovery. A second sickness, giving occasion for a third appearance of Christ, was followed by the same result. In these successive proffers of his religion, Jesus, reversing the policy of the Sibyl, who at each return with her prophetic books demanded severer terms, held forth more ample promises to the unbelieving Joseph: and at the fourth visit, the gift of miracle is imparted to him. Timid and hesitating, he proceeds to experiment upon a furious maniac of Tiberias; and by virtue of the sign of the cross, instantly ejects the demon. Strange to say, he is still incredulous: and no further miracles seem to have been wasted on so hopeless a subject. Indeed more sublunary considerations were much better adapted to the temper of his mind. Being shortly after sent on a mission to collect dues, and reform abuses, for the Hebrew ecclesiastics, he incurred the enmity of some of his nation, whom he had removed from places of trust and emolument. The discontented forced their way to his apartment. It was at the luckless moment when he happened to have before him a copy of the Gospels lent to him by a Christian acquaintance. They beat him violently, carried him to the synagogue, and repeated the castigation there: and, though he was delivered from their hands by the friendly interposition of the bishop from whom he had borrowed the Gospels, the persecution followed him on his departure: and at a subsequent point of his journey, he almost lost his life by being thrown into the river Cydnus. At this juncture, however, he was recommended to the Emperor Constantine, —“that genuine servant of Christ:” received office and rank from him, with permission to prefer to him any request that he might think proper. Inflamed with a sudden zeal for the Gospel, he solicited and obtained a commission to build churches to Christ in all the Jewish towns and villages;—a task which no zeal had hitherto accomplished, lukewarm Christians having excused themselves from the attempt on the plea, that there was not a believer in the country.\*—Epiphanius con-

\* It is surprising, that the Irish Protestant Establishment has never availed itself of so venerable a precedent, in favour of churches without congregations. The words of Epiphanius are much to the point: the proposal was—*ἐὶὰ προστάγματος βασιλικοῦ οἰκοδομῆσαι Χριστῷ ἐκκλησίας ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι καὶ κώμαις τῶν Ἰουδαίων. ἔνθα τις οὐδέποτε ἴσχυσεν οἰκοδομῆσαι ἐκκλησίας, διὰ τὸ μήτε Ἑλληνα, μήτε Σαμαρείτην, μήτε Χριστιανὸν, μέσον αὐτῶν εἶναι.*

tinues: "Joseph received written credentials with his appointment: and went to Tiberias, carrying with him a letter of credit on the imperial treasury for the expenses of the undertaking, and his own private salary. He began his task in Tiberias. In that city there was already a spacious temple, called, I think, the Adrianeum, which, remaining still incomplete, the citizens were anxious to fit up as a public bath-house. Joseph no sooner discovered this edifice, than he took advantage of it for his purpose: and finding that, up to a certain height, it had been constructed of square stones, measuring four cubits each, he began from that elevation to execute his design for an ecclesiastical building. Quick-lime and other materials were of course indispensable; and he ordered six or seven lime kilns to be made outside the city. The audacious and determined Jews resort to that black art (*μαγανείας*) which never fails them; and, by tricks and magic, the brave fellows, *γενναῖται*, contrive to damp the fire; though their success was only temporary. At first, however, the fire went down, and did no work, and appeared to have lost its natural properties. Those who tended the kilns, and had the charge of the fuel, finding that every thing stood still, explained the thing to Joseph. He was stung with mortification; and burning with zeal towards the Lord, he rushed out of the city, and called for water in one of those urns which the people of those parts term *Cacubia*. A crowd of Jews had thronged to the spot, curious to see what would be Joseph's resource, and the result of their own machinations. In the presence of them all he took the urn; and with his finger having made on it the sign of the cross, he loudly invoked the name of Jesus, and spoke thus: 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified by the common ancestors of myself and of this multitude now present, let this water have power to overcome all the magic and incantations which these men have practised, and to restore to the fire its natural qualities, that the house of the Lord may be finished.' Having said thus, he sprinkled the water on each of the kilns; the spells were dissolved, and, in the sight of all, the fire blazed up. The multitudes present, shouted, as they returned: 'There is One God, the helper of the Christians.'"—*Adv. Hær., Lib. i. Tom. ii. Ebionæi, Vol. I. p. 1306, Coloniae, 1682.*

Epiphanius appears to have been scarcely less credulous with respect to matters under his own observation. He says, that "for the conviction of unbelievers, fountains, and even rivers, are at the present day turned into wine. At Cibra, a town of Caria, there is a fountain which annually undergoes this change, at the very hour when at the bidding of Christ, the attendants at the marriage feast at Cana in Galilee, drew wine from the water vessels, and presented it to the president of the feast. Another fountain of the same kind exists at Gerasa in Arabia. I have myself drunk from the fountain of Cibra, and my brethren from that of Gerasa."—*Adv. Hær. Lib. ii. Hær. li. Tom. i. p. 451.*

The following may be taken as a specimen of this Father's skill in the interpretation both of nature and of scripture: he says, "There is no bird that

manifests such a love for its offspring as the pelican. The female, while sitting on the nest to take care of her young, cherishes them with such tenderness, that she pierces their sides with her kisses, and they die of the wounds. In three days the male bird visits the nest, and is deeply affected at finding his young ones dead. Under the impulse of his grief, he strikes his own side, and opens wounds in it; and the blood which flows thence, infused into the wounds of the young birds, restores them to life. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ had his side pierced by a spear, and immediately there came forth blood and water. And he dropped his blood upon his young ones,—that is, on Adam, and Eve, and the prophets, and all the dead,—and enlightened the world, and gave them life by his three days sepulture, and his resurrection. It is on this account that he said by the Prophet, ‘I am like a pelican in the wilderness.’”—Physiol. c. 8.

The reader will probably not think Jortin harsh in saying, that this Father was “made up of hastiness and credulity,” or in calling him “the father of tales.”

Gibbon has already enabled the English reader to form a just estimate of the temper of Tertullian, by quoting a few sentences from the conclusion of his tract upon the games. The whole passage deserves to be read:—

“What a spectacle is at hand in the Advent of the Lord, doubted, humbled, withheld from triumph no longer! What joy among the angels, what glory for the saints rising to life! What a kingdom for the just for evermore! What a city in the new Jerusalem! For it will not be without its games;—it will have the final and eternal day of judgment, which the Gentiles now treat with unbelief and scorn,—when so vast a series of ages, with all their productions, will be hurled into one absorbing fire. How magnificent the scale of *that* game! With what admiration,—what laughter,—what glee,—what triumph shall I perceive so many mighty monarchs, who had been given out as received into the skies, even Jove himself and his votaries, moaning in unfathomable gloom. The governors, too, persecutors of the Christian name, cast into fiercer torments than they had devised against the faithful, and liquefying amid shooting spires of flame! And those sage philosophers, who had deprived the Deity of his offices, and questioned the existence of a soul, or denied its future union with the body, meeting again with their disciples only to blush before them in those ruddy fires! not to forget the poets, trembling, not before the tribunal of Rhadamanthus or Minos, but at the unexpected bar of Christ! Then is the time to hear the tragedians, doubly pathetic now that they bewail their own agonies;—to observe the actors, released by the fierce elements from all restraint upon their gestures;—to admire the Charioteer, glowing all over on the car of torture;—to watch the wrestlers, thrust into the struggles, not of the gymnasium, but of the flames. Yet no: even this spectacle shall I forego, to revel with insatiable gaze in the dismay of our Lord’s own persecutors. ‘Here he is,’ shall I say, ‘the Carpenter’s Son,’—‘the Sabbath breaker,’—‘the Samaritan,’—‘the possessed.’ Here is he, whose

life you purchased from Judas;—he, whom you buffeted, and scourged, and spat upon, and presented with vinegar and gall. Here is he, whose body was removed by the arts of his disciples, to support the tale of a resurrection,—or by the anxiety of the gardener, lest his lettuces should be hurt by the feet of visitors. What prætor or consul, or questor or priest, can purchase you by his munificence a game of triumph like this? Yet we, by the imaginative power of faith, enjoy a foretaste of it already. And what must we say of those reserved felicities, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and it hath never entered the heart of man to conceive? I flatter myself they will be more grateful than the Circus, or the Stadium, or the stage-box itself.”—*De Spect.* c. 30.

No one can fail to acknowledge the pertinency of the late Dr. Arnold's question, “Who would value for any church, or for any opinion, the testimony of such a man as Tertullian?”—*Life*, vol. ii. letter 134.

Jerome's theological violence might receive the credit of sincerity, if his whole life were not in conformity with the episcopal policy of siding with the strongest party. The dispute which most severely agitated his times, was respecting the tenets and writings of Origen. This father, during the two hundred years which had elapsed since his death, had been held in the highest esteem, and thought to confer great honour upon the church by his uncommon learning, and his pretensions to philosophy. Jerome had ranked himself amongst his most ardent admirers; had translated many of his works for the use of the Latin churches, and promised to translate more; had boasted of being his imitator; and affirmed it to betray sheer ignorance to deny, that after the Apostles, Origen was the chief glory of the church.\* In the year 385, however, Alexandria received a new bishop, Theophilus,—a man who was vehemently opposed to the followers of Origen. His hatred to the Origenists proceeded, not from any religious zeal, but from some personal offence which he had received from the monks of the Nitrian desert. These monks had interfered with some ambitious and artful designs of the bishop; and he vented his indignation, by denouncing their favourite religious tenets and writings,—which were those of Origen. Imperial edicts were obtained against them; popular fury was deliberately excited; ignorant deserters from the persecuted party were made to swear that in a certain dark cavern they had seen Origen tormented in hell fire; the books of the once revered father were prohibited; his followers driven from Egypt, Syria, and Cyprus; and inhuman attempts made to deprive them of shelter and hospitality in their flight. All this Jerome not only sanctioned, but instigated; and even wrote again and again to Theophilus, reproaching him with his lenity to the heretics. He boasts of his share in these proceedings: “The rescripts of the Emperors, which order the expulsion of the Origenists from Alexandria and Egypt, were issued at my suggestion: that the Roman bishop detests them with so in-

\* *Rufin. in Hieron. lib. ii. Hieron. Op. ii. tom. iv. par. 2, p. 42.*—Edit. Benedict.

tense an aversion, is the effect of my advice : that the whole world has recently been in a blaze of hatred against Origen, who was once read with perfect composure, is the work of my pen." In a letter to Theophilus he says, "Many of the saints are far from being pleased with your patient treatment of this abominable heresy : and while you vainly expect to correct by your lenity an evil that preys upon the vitals of the church, they think that, in giving an opportunity for the repentance of a few, you foster the audacity of the wretches, and strengthen their faction." Whether Theophilus only wanted a flapper like this, to adopt a course so truly congenial to his own temper, it is impossible to say : but his vigour appears shortly after to satisfy even his ardent correspondent ; for in another letter, written within a year of the former, Jerome says ; "I write briefly to assure you, that the zeal of your emissaries for the faith, their activity in exploring the districts of Palestine for heretics, their perseverance in hunting the creatures to their dens and dispersing them, will give a triumph to the whole world, and fill it with the glory of your victories ; the multitude will gaze with exultation at the standard of the cross lifted at Alexandria, and the brilliant trophies won from heresy. Go on in your course of vigour and of zeal. You have shown that hitherto your silence has been a stroke of policy, not an imbecility of will. For, to speak candidly to your lordship, we used to lament that you were so patient ; and, ignorant of the tactics of our leader, were eager for the destruction of these wretches. But I see, you kept your hand aloft so long, and suspended the blow, only to strike more terribly."—*Epistolæ* 58, 59, Hieron. Op. tom. iv. part 2, pp. 597, 598, Edit. Benedict.

Note 6. "*Justified, not by its evidence, but by its expediency.*" Page 35.

This justification of the pretensions of the Roman Catholic church has been occasionally insinuated by some of its less cautious defenders. One of its most ingenious living advocates, the editor of "Captain Rock," has ventured upon this dangerous ground. In his "Travels of an Irish Gentleman in search of a Religion," he devotes a chapter (the 19th) to an inquiry into the operation of "human policy," "as a subordinate instrument," in maintaining the "permanence, indefectibility, and unity" of the Catholic Church : and he wanders so far in tracing this course of "policy," that one wonders how any one, who is found straying so near the camp of the enemy, can be received, without suspicion of treachery, among his friends.

"To return," he says, "to *the more directly human means*, by which the stability of the Catholic Church has been thus wonderfully preserved,—we have seen that to the maintenance of entire and changeless unity among her children, all the energies of her most enlightened pastors have in all times been directed ; and such a system of union being, in fact, indispensable both to the peace and durability of their church, it is of importance to enquire by what they so well succeeded in effecting it. Was it by throwing open the scriptures to the multitude ? Was it by leaving, like modern reformers, the right of

judgment unfettered, and allowing every man to interpret the sacred volume as he fancied? Far from it; they were as little Protestant on this point as on all others. They asked with St. Paul, "Are all Prophets? are all Teachers?" They knew, with St. Peter, that there are in the scriptures "things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction." They saw the consequences of the first steps of dissent in the random courses of the heretics of their day." \* \* \* \* "The heads of the church continued invariably to act upon the system of requiring all within the fold to follow one Shepherd; and if any resisted or dissented, cast them forth from the flock. To this exclusion, no less awful a penalty was attached than the forfeiture of eternal salvation."

The plain doctrine of this passage is, that the rights to prohibit enquiry, to withhold the scriptures, to inflict excommunication, and to threaten damnation, were expedient assumptions for the support of a vast ecclesiastical corporation. To assure the people that the heretic incurred the "forfeiture of eternal salvation,"\* was among "the more directly human means," of upholding the church. It was then, after all, a trick, and not a truth!—*Travels of an Irish Gentleman, &c. vol. i. pp. 191, 194.*

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### NOTES TO LECTURE III.

Note 1. "*Clothe himself with the attributes of infallibility.*" Page 46.

That the assumption of infallibility lurks in the very principle of dogmatical religion, it is easy to render evident in theory: the following remarkable passage, from the pen of one of the most powerful of English writers, will exemplify the fact. So ingenuous an avowal of the moral sentiments which characterize the bigot, is rarely to be found in authors of merited repute. Throughout the passage, it will be observed, Mr. Hall not merely applies to belief and unbelief epithets descriptive only of moral qualities; but treats dissent from his notions as a resistance to divine authority, and affirms that the adoption of them, being a prerequisite to the divine approbation, is of more transcendent merit than any personal integrity. He is passing judgment on the act of Theophilus Lindsey, in resigning a benefice on his adoption of Unitarian opinions:

"We cannot permit ourselves to place sacrifices to error on the same foot-

\* *Quisquis ergo ab hac Catholicæ Ecclesiæ fuerit separatus, quantumlibet laudabiliter se vivere existimet, hoc solo scelere, quod a Christi unitate disjunctus est, non habebit vitam; sed ira Dei manet super eum.* This sentence is part of a circular letter addressed to the Donatists by a council of Numidian bishops, assembled at Zerta or Certæ. The letter is the production of Augustin, who had himself been guilty of the Manichean heresy.—*August. Op. tom. ii. p. 347, Edit. Benedict.*



ing as sacrifices to truth, without annihilating their distinction. If revealed truth possesses any thing of sanctity and importance, the profession of it must be more meritorious than the profession of its opposite; and, by consequence, sacrifices made to that profession must be more estimable. He who suffers in the cause of truth is entitled to admiration; he who suffers in the defence of error and delusion, to our commiseration; which are unquestionably very different sentiments. If truth is calculated to elevate and sanctify the character, he who cheerfully sacrifices his worldly emolument to its pursuit, must be supposed to have participated, in no common degree, of its salutary operation. He who suffers equal privations in the propagation of error evinces, it is confessed, his possession of moral honesty; but unless persuasion could convert error into truth, it is impossible it should impart to error the effects of truth. Previous to the profession of any tenets whatever, there lies an obligation on all to whom the light of the Gospel extends, to believe the truth. We are bound to confess Christ before men, only because we are bound to believe on him. But if, instead of believing on him, we deny him in his essential characters, which is the case with Socinians, the sincerity of that denial will indeed rescue us from the guilt of prevarication, but not from that of unbelief. It is possible at least, since some sort of faith in Christ is positively asserted to be essential to salvation, that the tenets of the Socinians may be such as to exclude that faith: that it does exclude it, no orthodox man can consistently deny; and how absurd it were to suppose a man should be entitled to the reward of a Christian confessor, merely for denying, *bonâ fide*, the doctrine which is essential to salvation! The sincerity which accompanies his profession, entitles him to the reward of a confessor: the error of the doctrine he professes, exposes him, at the same time, to the sentence of condemnation as an unbeliever! If we lose sight of Socinianism, for a moment, and suppose an unbeliever in Christianity *in toto*, to suffer for the voluntary and sincere promulgation of his tenets, we would ask, in what rank are we to place this infidel confessor? Is *he* entitled to rank with *any* of the confessors? If he is, our Saviour's terms of salvation are essentially altered; and though he pronounces an anathema on him who shall deny him before men, the sturdy and unshaken denial of him in the face of worldly discouragement, would answer, it seems, as well as a similar confession. Men are left at their liberty in this respect; and they are equally secure of eternal happiness, whether they deny or whether they confess, the Saviour, providing they do it firmly and sincerely. If these consequences appear shocking, and the negative be asserted, then it is admitted that the truth of the doctrine confessed, enters essentially into the inquiry, whether he who suffers in his opinions, is to be, *ipso facto*, classed with Christian confessors. Let it be remembered, that we are not denying that he who hazards his worldly interest, rather than conceal or dissemble his tenets, how false and dangerous soever they may be, is an honest man, and, *quoad hoc*, acts a virtuous part; but that he is entitled to the same kind of approbation with the champion of truth. That the view we have taken of the subject is consonant to the scrip-

tures, will not be doubted by those who recollect that St. John rests his attachment to Gaius and to the elect lady, on the truth which dwelt in them; that he professed no Christian attachment, but for the truth's sake; and that he forbade Christians to exercise hospitality, or to show the least indication of friendship to those who taught any other doctrine than that which he and his fellow Apostles had taught. The source of the confusion and absurdity which necessarily attach to the opinions expressed on this subject, consists in confounding together moral sincerity and Christian piety. We are perfectly willing to admit that the latter cannot subsist without the former; but we are equally certain that the former is by no means so comprehensive as necessarily to include the latter. We should have imagined it unnecessary to enter into an elaborate defence of so plain a position as this, that it is one thing to be what the world styles an honest man, and another to be a Christian, —a distinction, obvious as it is, sufficient to solve the whole mystery, and to account for the conduct of Mr. Lindsey, without adopting the unmeaning jargon of his biographer, who styles him, in innumerable places, the *venerable confessor*. How repugnant the language we have been endeavouring to expose, is to that which was held in the purest and best ages of the church, must be obvious to all who are competently acquainted with ecclesiastical history. The Marcionites, we are informed by Eusebius, boasted of their having furnished a multitude of martyrs, but they were not the less on that account considered as deniers of Christ. Hence, when orthodox Christians happened occasionally to meet at the places of martyrdom with Montanists and Manicheans, they refused to hold the least communion with them, lest they should be supposed to consent to their errors. In a word, the *nature* of the doctrine professed must be taken into consideration, before we can determine that profession to be a Christian profession; nor is martyrdom entitled to the high veneration justly bestowed on acts of heroic piety, on any other ground than its being, what the term imports, an *attestation of the truth*. It is the saint which makes the martyr, not the martyr the saint."—Robert Hall's Review of Belsham's Memoirs of Lindsey, p. 240.

This passage throws no disguise over the consequences which I have endeavoured to attach to the Protestant idea of orthodoxy. It appears,

That no one who disputes Mr. Hall's sense of scripture can acquire, by any acts, however noble or generous, a title to "any exercise of hospitality, or the least indication of friendship."

That heaven is a place for those who have alighted on the right interpretation of certain ancient books; and that each man is to expect to meet there with his own sect.

That hell is a place for men of "moral honesty,"—for men who "act a virtuous part;" where they lament, "*bonâ fide*," that they were not able to perceive the deep interest they had in being orthodox.

That the "honest man," if a heretic, loses his eternal life no less than the "dissembler," who affects orthodoxy though persuaded of its falsehood: the only difference being, that, during life, the dissembler gets the credit of being

a saint, the honest man that of being an outcast. Every wise heretic therefore will be a hypocrite ; since he loses nothing in the other world, and is a great gainer in this.

It is surprising that a mind so capacious as Mr. Hall's should fail to perceive the predicament into which the evidences of revelation are brought, by ascribing to Christianity such notions as these. If this be the internal character of the Gospel, no external testimony could prove it true. The moral evidence against the foregoing propositions exceeds in strength any concatenation of historical proofs, in favour of the Divine origin of the system said to comprise them. I admit that the language of scripture to which he appeals, and a multitude of other passages, do offer very startling *primâ facie* evidence in favour of his view of Christianity ; that there is a salvation affirmed to be absolutely dependent upon faith, and an everlasting damnation declared to be consequent on mere unbelief ; that this faith and unbelief cannot, by any interpreter's wand, be conjured into virtue and sin ; and that if the salvation promised, and the condemnation threatened, mean the awards of a future life, it is useless to mystify the fact, that Christianity is a religion strictly exclusive. To the other life, however, these words have, I apprehend, no reference whatever. The explanation of them does not belong to the subject of this note : but having pointed out the *logical* bearings of Mr. Hall's argument, it seemed incumbent on me thus briefly to hint at the *scriptural* way of escape from its most revolting conclusions.

The insulting practice of applying terms descriptive of *moral depravity* to supposed *intellectual errors* was much in favour with Mr. Hall. It is to be regretted that one who could so powerfully hurl the bolt of reason should condescend to roll these mimic thunders on the imagination. He is very angry that Unitarians should not like to be called after Socinus ; and in assuring them that they ought to feel honoured by association with the great heresiarch, he says :

"In the esteem of all but themselves they have descended many degrees lower in the scale of error, have plunged many fathoms deeper in the gulph of impiety ; yet with an assurance of which they have furnished the only example, they affect to consider themselves injured by being styled Socinians, when they know, in their own consciences, that they differ from Socinus only in pushing the degradation of the Saviour to a much greater length ; and that, in the views of the *Christian* world, their religious delinquencies differ from his, *only as treason differs from sedition, or sacrilege from theft.* \* \* \* Let them not be designated by a term (Unitarian), which is merely coveted by them *for the purpose of chicane and imposture.*"—Robert Hall's Review of Gregory's Letters, p. 199.

The language of infallibility has a tendency to spread from one subject to another ; and from dogmatic theology it has recently passed into questions of ecclesiastical polity. According to Rev. Mr. Gathercole, "*all Dissenters* are actuated by the Devil ;" and "the curse of God appears to rest heavily upon them ;" and "every Dissenter, in choosing his own teacher, *despiseth and re-*

*jecteth God*, in despising and rejecting his regularly appointed ministers, who are his representatives, acting in his name, and in virtue of the authority which he has committed to them, through a medium of his appointment."—Gathercole's Letters to a Dissenting Minister, quoted in Rev. E. Stanley's Observations on Religion and Education in Ireland, p. 18.

Mr. Hall's zeal for Christianity, and Mr. Gathercole's for his Church, exemplify two out of the three steps indicated in the Aphorism of Coleridge: "He, who begins by loving Christianity better than truth, will proceed by loving his own Sect or Church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all."—Aids to Reflection. Moral and Religious Aph. XXV.

Note 2. "*The city opens its gates to none, but those that see the obelisk.*"

—Page 47.

I am happy to be able to claim for this illustration, the sanction of an authority so admirable in matters either of logic or of taste, as Rev. J. Blanco White. A name so grave steps in most opportunely to shelter me from the charge of levity, in the use of an analogy, which from the palpable form into which it throws an important principle, has long been a favourite with me; but, from the conventional solemnity of theological argument, a very timid one. I believe indeed that, if there be any thing ludicrous in the illustration, it arises merely from its truth: and the reasoner would be placed under a hard condition, if he were required to point out absurdity, without exciting any perception of the absurd. It may not be uninteresting to my readers to observe the different, and, I am conscious, the very superior manner in which the idea is handled by Mr. White.

"I have already, incidentally, illustrated the theological notion of *pride of reason* by what (if the same interests, internal and external, which occasion this clamour against reason were involved) would certainly have been called the *pride of sight*. Allow me to dwell once more on the nature of that very considerable vice. *Pride of sight* would be defined, *an inordinate value set on the individual's power of vision*. The most approved and meritorious method to avoid this criminal excess would be to put out one's eyes. The person who had performed this noble act of self-denial should be entitled to declare, uncontradicted, that he never before had seen so well. He should, in consequence of the superiority of this new sight, be chosen leader of other men who still kept those delusive organs, *the eyes*. The sacrifice of the eyes would be offered up as a testimony of reverence to the Creator of Light, as that of reason is now considered an appropriate tribute to the fountain of it. Of two men who looked, apparently with the same intensity, at a remote and indistinct object *he* who asserted that he saw even the minutest parts, and denied the possibility that any good and honest person could differ from himself in the description, should be declared *thereby* to possess the virtue of *humbleness of sight*; he, on the contrary, who confessed that his eyes could not discover what the other man said he saw, but granted that he

might be allowed to enjoy his view without blame, should be charged with *pride of sight* in a most offensive degree. Though both were exerting their power of vision under the light of the same sun, and had their eyes equally open, the latter should be accused of despising and hating the light of heaven, and be strongly suspected of *winking*; if this could not be proved externally, it should be firmly believed that he had an internal power of paralyzing his optic nerve, and making himself stone-blind. The happy observer of such parts of the remote object as he, in the same breath, declared to be *invisible*, should earnestly call upon the other, as if he would save him from death and infamy, to renounce his *pride of sight*, and agree to *see* the same things which he (the adviser) had, in his great *humility* of vision, firmly determined to discover. Such should be the moral law of the *Pride of Sight*."—Observations on Heresy and Orthodoxy, pp. 84, 85.

There is an amusing satirical dialogue by Erasmus, which, having suggested to me the comparison between the delusions of the intellectual and the corporeal vision, deserves to be pointed out for the entertainment of my readers. It is entitled '*Exorcismus, sive Spectrum*;' and describes the arts by which more than one theological hoax was once passed upon the credulous inhabitants of Yorkshire. The usual order of things is inverted by Erasmus, who makes the conjuror a layman, and exemplifies the delusion in a priest. The trick, however, which occupies the greater part of the dialogue, and of which the priest is the object, is too long a story to admit of quotation: and indeed it is another exercise of ingenuity by the same author, which alone illustrates my present subject, the *superstition of the eyes*. Near London lived a waggish country gentleman, of the name of Pool. "With him, and a party of friends," says the narrator, "we were riding to Richmond (in Yorkshire); and of our number were several whom you could not but call sensible men. The sky was singularly clear, not shaded by the slightest cloud. Suddenly Pool, looking intently overhead, crossed himself repeatedly on the forehead and breast; and with features expressive of amazement, exclaimed to himself, 'Good God! what do I see?'—When the companions who were riding next him asked, what it was that he saw, he only crossed himself more vehemently, and said, 'Merciful Heaven! avert the omen!' Impatient for an explanation, his companions pressed round him: and pointing with his finger to the part of the sky on which his eyes were still fixed, he said, 'Do you not see there a huge dragon, armed with golden horns, and a tail coiled upwards?' When they answered no; they could not see it, he bid them look harder, and kept pointing out the place: and at length one of them, afraid of seeming to have no use of his eyes, protested that he saw it too. His example was followed by one after another; for it appeared not creditable to miss seeing what was so evident. And to make a long story short, in three days, all England had heard the rumour of this mystery.—Nor were there wanting those, who prepared grave commentaries on its meaning."—*Colloquiorum Erasmi Opus Aureum. Exorcismus, sive Spectrum.*

Note 3. "*Calvin, Beza, and Melancthon dealt relentlessly in the persuasion of the prison and the stake.*"—Page 50.

In turning from the writings to the acts of the Reformers, the only surprise is, that they persecuted so little. The fierce language in which they describe all departures from their own theology, and their constant ascription to heresy of a diabolical origin and a damnable end, excite an expectation of more practical cruelty than their lives exhibited; and it is satisfactory to believe, that the tendencies of their personal characters interposed a check, in so many instances, on the natural operation of their system. Still, there is no want of instances, displaying a melancholy consistency between their conduct and their bigotry of speech. Luther, who called the king of England a fool and an ass, a blasphemmer and a liar, and Cardinal Wolsey a public monster, detestable to God and men, was far from contenting himself with equally innocuous displays of wrath against opponents nearer home. Carolostadt, his coadjutor, whose only offences were, that he differed from Luther about the Real Presence, and dared to proceed with the Reformation in his absence, found himself an exile from Wittemberg, through the influence of the great Reformer; driven from place to place, he wrote letters to the people who had been under his pastoral care; they were summoned by the tolling of a bell to hear the letters read, and when told that he had signed himself "Luther's Exile, condemned without hearing," they wept aloud. In his persecution of Muncer, Luther cannot be justified by the part which that remarkable man took in the insurrection of the Westphalian and Saxon peasantry; for Muncer had not joined the insurgents, when the Reformer procured his expulsion from Mulhausen; nor does any charge appear to have been brought against him, beyond that of doctrinal dissent from some of Luther's notions. "He began to preach," says Sleidan, "not only against the Roman pontiff, but even against Luther himself."

But there is nothing in the history of Luther, which can be compared with the atrocity of Calvin, in the seizure, trial, and execution of Servetus. It may be fairly doubted whether the Saxon Reformer, who died six years before this tragedy at Geneva, would have sanctioned the proceedings of his Swiss fellow-labourer. Perhaps, however, it is well for his memory, that he did not live to be submitted to this test; for of all the distinguished Reformers living at the time, there is not one, except within the heretical confines of Poland and Transylvania, who did not give an avowed support to Calvin. Beza wrote two successive works in defence of the general doctrine that heretics ought to be punished by the magistrate, and of the particular transactions in the case of Servetus: "when that blasphemmer, Servetus," he says, "was put to death in this city, after a vain application of milder punishments; and when the treatise so pious, learned, and elaborate, which John Calvin published in defence of that affair, appeared not to satisfy the public mind, I took the same argument in hand."—It is satisfactory to find that even pious, learned, and elaborate reasonings, however convincing to the acuter understandings of

ecclesiastics, cannot reconcile the popular mind to religious bloodshed.—Melancthon, praised as he is for his mildness, placed on record his approval of the act : and practically proved the sincerity of his sympathy with such deeds, by threatening a pupil of his own with a dungeon and irons, if he dared to say any thing against the existence of the devil. Bucer, one should suppose, can hardly have been satisfied with Calvin's treatment of Servetus, for he had pronounced this poor heretic worthy of being embowelled and torn asunder.

In classing Faustus Socinus with the other Reformers of his age, as an advocate of persecution, I have no intention of repeating the charge, so often brought against him, of being accessory to the imprisonment of his friend Francis David. No evidence exists, sufficient to fix upon him so serious an imputation ; \* but though his conduct may afford a favourable contrast to that of the German and Swiss Reformers, it is impossible to allow him the credit of any enlarged notions of religious liberty. He distinctly states that an heresiarch, who perseveres in teaching new doctrines, foreign to the notions of his times, and who forms his converts into a religious society, ought to be treated like a maniac,—commiserated, but chained and imprisoned.

## NOTES TO LECTURE IV.

Note 1. "*Because we perceive them to be unscriptural.*"—Page 64.

That the opinions prevalent among Christians, respecting the province of the understanding in religion, are justly represented in the foregoing passage, will be rendered evident by attention to the following citations :

"Let us not forget," says Dr. Wardlaw, "what is the proper province of reason, with regard to Divine Revelation. We ought, beyond all controversy, to exercise our reason, in determining the question, whether this book contains a Revelation from God. This we must do, by an examination of the evidences of various kinds, external and internal, by which its high claims are substantiated. But suppose this great point fairly ascertained : what is the province of reason *then* ? Is it not equally beyond controversy, that, *on this supposition*, the only rational conduct is *implicit faith*. Once ascertain the scriptures to be 'given by inspiration of God,' and nothing can be more absurd, than to erect our reason into a standard of the truth or falsehood of what they contain. This would be to deify reason : to 'exalt it above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.'"—Wardlaw's Discourses on the principal points of the Socinian Controversy, p. 24.

\* Those who wish to see the only complete investigation of the evidence in this case, may refer to an interesting paper by Rev. James Yates, in the Christian Pioneer, vol. viii. p. 53.

Robert Hall says, "Let the fair grammatical import of scriptural language be investigated, and whatever propositions are by an easy and natural interpretation deducible from thence, let them be received as the dictates of infinite wisdom, whatever aspect they bear, or whatever difficulties they present."—Review of Gregory's Letters, p. 183.

But the most emphatic, and I must think, the most consistent, statement of this principle is to be found in Dr. Chalmers' treatise on the 'Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation.' Other writers, by conceding that the reasonableness of its doctrines enters as an element into the evidence of a Revelation, admit the competency of the human understanding to judge of probabilities in questions of religion; and thus lose all just title to turn round upon the same understanding afterwards, and rebuke it for presuming to criticise a tenet claiming to be scriptural. But Dr. Chalmers repudiates all internal moral evidence, rests all the claims of Christianity on the historical proofs of a supernatural origin; and demands of every enquirer who is satisfied with these proofs, that when at length he opens the Bible, he should assent implicitly to every proposition he may find, and not allow his strength of faith to depend, in any degree, on the character of the communication. He says, "We do not follow the example of those who have written on the Deistical controversy. Take up Leland's performance, and it will be found, that one half of his discussion is expended upon the reasonableness of the doctrines, and in asserting the validity of the argument which is founded upon that reasonableness. It would save a vast deal of controversy, if it could be proved that all this is superfluous and uncalled for; that upon the authority of the proofs already insisted on, the New Testament must be received as a revelation from heaven; and that instead of sitting in judgment over it, nothing remains on our part, but an act of unreserved submission to all the doctrines and information which it offers to us." (p. 210.)—"If the historical evidence of Christianity is found to be conclusive, we conceive the investigation to be at an end; and that nothing remains, on our part, but an act of unconditional surrender to all its doctrines." (p. 243.)

There is perhaps no point on which the individuality of opinion prevalent among Unitarians is more marked, than on the authority of the Scriptures in questions of doctrine. The statement which perhaps most fairly represents the general sentiment among them is the following: "We are as much bound to trust the declarations, and obey the precepts of Christ, as if those precepts and declarations had been communicated to each of us individually, by express revelation from the Father of lights." And "the Apostles in their representations of Christian doctrine, and in their directions as to Christian duty, are to be regarded as the ambassadors of Christ, and the oracles of God: and, therefore, as soon as any book is ascertained to have been written by an Apostle, its divine authority, as to faith and practice, becomes unquestionable."—Carpenter's Reply to Magee, pp. 69, 82. At the same time, the excellent author of this work admits that the New Testament writings contain portions



that are neither declarations of Christian doctrine, nor precepts of Christian duty, and which do not therefore possess this authority; he speaks of expressions of Christ *founded on* prevalent opinions, and not as designed to *reveal* or *sanction* them." Yet no external test is offered, by which the divine portion can be distinguished from the human. To say that whatever respects faith and duty,—or whatever respects the purposes of Christ's mission, is divine,—gives us no help; since the very questions to be determined are, what were the purposes of Christ's mission, and what things belong to human faith and duty.—Until some test is pointed out for separating the fallible from the infallible propositions of scripture, I cannot see how Dr. Wardlaw's statement can be confuted, that, "if while the scriptures are acknowledged to *contain* truth from God, their proper inspiration is, notwithstanding, entirely denied;"—"whatever degree of deference we may think reasonably due to them, yet as the productions of fallible men, *no part of them whatever* can be an infallible criterion." This appears to me the inevitable consequence of regarding Christianity as a didactic, instead of an historical and spiritual system.

With regard to what may be called the *intensity* of the authority of scripture, in its divine portions, Unitarian writers appear to entertain different opinions.—The only point on which I can discover a general agreement is, that no scriptural evidence can establish a self-contradictory proposition. The amount of mere improbability which it can overcome is very variously estimated. The high doctrine of which I have spoken in the Lecture is, I admit, not often to be found; and the language in which it appears to be conveyed is not, perhaps, intended in all cases to be very rigidly interpreted. One of the old Unitarian Tracts, in speaking of Socinians, says, "Hath the holy scripture, that is, hath God, said it? They will believe, though all men and angels contradict it. They will always prefer the infinite wisdom of God, before the fallible dictates of human or angelic reason." \* Mr. Lindsey, after acknowledging that he could not believe anything inconsistent with reason (by which he evidently means, anything self-contradictory) says; "Let me but know clearly, that God has signified his mind and will; and then, let the subject be ever so unfathomable by me, I will receive and believe it; because no better reason can possibly be given for anything, than that God hath said it."—Examination of Robinson's Plea, preface, p. 24. In an excellent Discourse entitled 'Christ One with God,' by Rev. J. G. Robberds, occurs the following passage: "I rejoice, for my part, that in Jesus Christ I have a teacher, to whose words I am required to yield *implicit faith*. I rejoice, that in his school, reason has no other part than that of an humble listener and learner. I rejoice, that in whatever disposition of mind I may be, and whether on the great questions of moral and religious duty, reason, of itself, might be more likely to act the friend or the traitor, I can go and consult an instructor who "is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,"

\* V. i. No. 9, p. 4, quoted in 'Yates's Vindication of Unitarianism,' p. 17.

—an instructor too, who speaks not merely as the adviser; who proposes not his sayings to be approved or rejected by the judgment of the hearer, who teaches not as the scribes and pharisees, as the reasoners, and disputers, and philosophers of this world; but with an authority that awes the attention which it demands; and after proofs of that authority in works such as no man could do unless God were with him, declares, ‘I and the Father are one.’—p. 18. I regret to find myself so little able to reconcile these sentiments with the positions maintained in the Lecture.

Note 2. “*To the test of which even Scripture must be brought.*”—

Page 64.

It is satisfactory to find, that for the doctrine of this passage, and of the Lecture generally which contains it, the sanction of John Locke can be quoted. While preparing this little volume for the press, I have met with the following passage in Lord King’s Life of that philosopher :

“Religion being that homage and obedience which man pays immediately to God, it supposes that man is capable of knowing that there is a God, and what is required by, and is acceptable to him, thereby to avoid his anger and procure his favour. That there is a God, and what that God is, nothing can discover to us, nor judge in us, but natural reason. For whatever discovery we receive any other way, must come originally from inspiration, which is an opinion or persuasion in the mind whereof a man knows not the rise nor reason, but is received there as a truth, coming from an unknown, and therefore a supernatural cause, and not founded upon those principles nor observations in the way of reasoning which makes the understanding admit other things for truths. But no such inspiration concerning God or his worship, can be admitted for truth by him that thinks himself thus inspired, much less by any other whom he would persuade to believe him inspired, any farther than it is conformable to reason; not only because where reason is not, I judge it is impossible for a man himself to distinguish betwixt inspiration and fancy, truth and error; but also it is impossible to have such a notion of God, as to believe that he should make a creature to whom the knowledge of himself was necessary, and yet not to be discovered by that way which discovers every thing else that concerns us, but was to come into the minds of men only by such a way, by which all manner of errors come in, and is more likely to let in falsehoods than truths, since nobody can doubt, from the contradiction and strangeness of opinions concerning God and religion in the world, that men are likely to have more frenzies than inspirations. Inspiration then, barely in itself, cannot be a ground to receive any doctrine not conformable to reason. In the next place, let us see how far inspiration can enforce on the mind any opinion concerning God or his worship, when accompanied with a power to do a miracle; and there too, I say, the last determination must be that of reason.

"1st. Because reason must be the judge what is a miracle and what not; which, not knowing how far the power of natural causes do extend themselves, and what strange effects they may produce, is very hard to determine.

"2nd. It will always be as great a miracle, that God should alter the course of natural things to overturn the principles of knowledge and understanding in a man, by setting up anything to be received by him as a truth which his reason cannot assent to, as the miracle itself; and so at best it will be but one miracle against another, and the greater still on reason's side; it being harder to believe that God should alter, and put out of its ordinary course some phenomenon of the great world for once, and make things act contrary to their ordinary rule, purposely that the mind of man might do so always afterwards, than that this is some fallacy or natural effect of which he knows not the cause, let it look never so strange." After stating a third reason, which it is unnecessary to quote, Mr. Locke continues thus: "I do not hereby deny in the least that God can do, or hath done, miracles for the confirmation of truth; but I only say, that we cannot think he should do them to enforce doctrines or notions of himself, or any worship of him not conformable to reason, or that we can receive such for truth for the miracle's sake, and even in those books which have the greatest proof of revelation from God, and the attestation of miracles to confirm their being so, the miracles are to be judged by the doctrine, and not the doctrine by the miracle."

Note 3. "*Can continue to take the name of Christian.*"—Page 72.

It is curious to observe the agreement between the two theological extremes, orthodoxy and anti-supernaturalism, respecting the definition of a Christian. The former, in attempting to *exclude* Unitarians from the definition, and the latter, when anxious to *include* himself, employ the very same argument: "it is not the belief that *Christianity is a religion from God*," or "*of the divine mission of Jesus Christ*,"—or "*of the facts recorded by the sacred historians*," "that constitutes a Christian; but the faith of *Christianity itself*:" "being a Christian means, being a disciple of Christ, and a believer of his doctrine: as an Aristotelian meant a disciple of Aristotle, and a Platonist of Plato." By such statements as these does the "Rationalist" justify his retention of the name of Christian, when, having discarded the miracles, he keeps his place in the school of Christ, and assents to him, *as a Platonist would to Plato*. Yet the statements which I have just quoted, are not from any Antisupernaturalist, but from *Dr. Wardlaw*. If, indeed, the *essential features* of Christianity are to be found in the doctrinal or preceptive parts of the scripture, it is difficult to deny to any one who holds the doctrines, and venerates the precepts he finds there, the title of Christian; and it is only on the supposition of the religion of Christ being, in one of its elements, *essentially historical*, that we can make a belief in his reality, and an allegiance to himself, the basis of our definition.

## NOTES TO LECTURE V.

Note 1. "*Is it not a noble thing to see him at last burst into the infinite, and kneel?*"—Page 80.

In the concluding pages of his immortal work, Newton breaks out into a noble utterance of veneration for the Supreme Author of the magnificence which he had been interpreting:—"This most beautiful system of sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being. And if the fixed stars are centres of other like systems, these being formed by the like wise counsel, must all be subject to the dominion of One. This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all: and on account of his dominion he is wont to be called Lord God, Ruler Universal.—The supreme God is a Being eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect."

In 1796, M. de la Place published a Synopsis of the Newtonian philosophy. "In the whole of this work," says Mr. Robison, "the author misses no opportunity of lessening the impression that might be made by the peculiar suitableness of any circumstance in the constitution of the solar system, to render it a scene of habitation and enjoyment to sentient beings, or which might lead the mind to the notion of the system's being contrived for any purpose whatever. He sometimes, on the contrary, endeavours to show how the alleged purpose may be much better accomplished in some other way. He labours to leave a general impression on the mind that the whole frame is the necessary result of the primitive and essential properties of matter, and that it could not be anything but what it is. He indeed concludes, like the illustrious Newton, with a survey of all that has been done and discovered, followed by some reflections suggested by this survey." He gives us to understand, that astronomy has now taught us how much we were mistaken in thinking ourselves an important part of the universe, for whose accommodation much has been done, as if we were the objects of peculiar care. "But we have been punished," says he, "for these mistaken notions of self-importance by the foolish anxieties to which they have given rise, and by the subjugation to which we have submitted under the influence of superstitious terrors. Mistaking our relations to the rest of the universe, social order has been supposed to have other foundations than justice and truth, and an abominable maxim has been admitted, that it was sometimes useful to deceive and to subdue mankind, in order to secure the happiness of society."

In some striking and beautiful reflections, Professor Robison proceeds to comment on these sentiments of La Place. There is no doubt, that he puts on them their true interpretation, when he says: "I cannot but suspect that M. de la Place would here insinuate, that the doctrine of a Deity, the Maker and Governor of this world, and of his peculiar attention to the conduct of

men, is not consistent with truth; and that the sanctions of religion, which have long been venerated as the great security of society, are as little consistent with justice." "This accords completely with his anxious endeavours, on all occasions, to flatten or depress everything that has the appearance of order, beauty, or subserviency, and to resolve all into the irresistible operation of the essential properties of matter." "I was grieved when I saw M. de la Place, after having so beautifully epitomised the philosophy of Sir Isaac Newton, conclude his performance with such a marked and ungraceful parody on the closing reflections of our illustrious master."

In the true spirit of this master, Professor Robison concludes: "Whoever is able to follow the steps of Newton over the magnificent scene, must be affected as he was, and must pronounce 'all very good.' It is peculiarly deserving of remark, that we see many contrivances in this system, which are of manifest subserviency to the enjoyments of man, and which do not appear to have any farther importance. Man is unquestionably the lord of this lower world, and all things are placed under his feet. But we see nothing to which man is exclusively subservient—nothing that is superior to man in excellence, so far as we can judge of what is excellent,—nothing but that wisdom, that power, and that beneficence, which seem to indicate and to characterise the Author and Conductor of the whole; I may add, that it is not one of our smallest obligations to the Author of Nature, that He has given us those powers of mind which enable us to perceive and to be delighted with the sight of this bright emanation of all his perfections.

"Sanctius his animal, mentisque capacious altæ,  
Finit in effigiem moderantū cuncta Deorum,  
Pronaque cum spectent animalia cætera terram,  
Os homini sublime dedit, cælumque tueri  
Jussit, et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus."

OVID.

Allow me to conclude in the words of Dr. Halley:

"Talia monstrantem mecum celebrate camænis:  
Vos ô cœlicolūm gaudentes nectare vesci,  
Newtonum, clausi reserantem scrinia veri,  
Newtonum, Musis charum, cui pectore puro  
Phœbus adest, totoque incessit Numine mentem  
Nec fas est propius mortali attingere divos."

HALLEY.

Note 2. "*Give me, they exclaim, for a pupil the sheer, blank Atheist; and away with the mischievous sentimentalism of natural piety.*"—Page 81.

"Viewed purely as an intellectual subject," says Dr. Chalmers, "we look upon the mind of an Atheist as in a better state of preparation for the proofs

of Christianity than the mind of a Deist. The one is a blank surface, on which evidence may make a fair impression, and where the finger of history may inscribe its credible and well-attested information; the other is occupied with preconceptions."—"We do not ask the Atheist to furnish himself with any previous conception. We ask him to come as he is; and, upon the strength of his own favorite principle, viewing it as a pure intellectual question, and abstracting from the more unmanageable tendencies of the heart and temper, we conceive his understanding to be in a high state of preparation, for taking in Christianity in a far purer and more scriptural form than can be expected from those whose minds are tainted and pre-occupied with their former speculations."—"Chalmers' Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation," chap. ix. pp. 248, 258.

That the anxiety of the eloquent author of this work to destroy all natural religion, arises from his consciousness, that it indisposes the mind to receive the orthodox doctrines is repeatedly admitted. "It is on the character of Revelation itself," he says, "that unbelievers found their objections to Christianity. It is on what they conceive to be the absurdity of its doctrines. It is because they see something in the nature or dispensation of Christianity which they think disparaging to the attributes of God, and not agreeable to that line of proceeding which the Almighty should observe in the government of his creatures. Rousseau expresses his astonishment at the strength of the historical testimony; so strong, that the inventor of the narrative appeared to him to be more miraculous than the hero. But the absurdities of this said revelation are sufficient, in his mind, to bear down the whole weight of its direct and external evidences. There was something in the doctrines of the New Testament repulsive to the taste, and the imagination, and perhaps even to the convictions of this interesting enthusiast. He could not reconcile them with his pre-established conceptions of the divine character and mode of operation. To submit to these doctrines he behoved to surrender that Theism which the powers of his ardent mind had wrought up into a most beautiful and delicious speculation. Such a sacrifice was not to be made. It was too painful. It would have taken away from him what every mind of genius and sensibility esteems to be the highest of all luxuries. It would destroy a system which had all that is fair and magnificent to recommend it, and mar the gracefulness of that fine intellectual picture on which this wonderful man had bestowed all the embellishments of feeling, and fancy, and eloquence."—Chap. viii.

## NOTES TO LECTURE VI.

Note 1. "*A Lycurgus might have signed.*"—Page 96.

An abstract of this interesting document may be found in "Robinson's Ecclesiastical Researches," p. 548, accompanied by some just comments on the obscure portion of German history to which it belongs. That Muncer has been unjustly treated by historians is evident, I think, not only from this striking statement of the peasants' grievances, but even from some traits of character incidentally noticed in Sleidane's account of him. That he was moved by genuine compassion for an oppressed people, and that his religion was the origin of that compassion, is sufficiently obvious, even from this partial narrative. The connection between the people's Christianity and their struggles for liberty is everywhere evident. "In the begynning of the spring time, began a newe commotion of the vulgare people against the prelates of the church, pretending a cause as though they would defende the Gospell, and brynge themselves out of bondage." Muncer's doctrine seems to have been simple and austere; and though tinged with the enthusiasm of his times, essentially generous and conducive to personal virtue. A man, he says, "must eschew open crymes," "chasten and make leane the body with fasting and simple apparel, frame the countenance unto gravitie, speake sel-dome, weare a long beard; he must get him out of company, and thinke oft of God what he is, and whether he hath any care over us." "Let us consider," he says, in an oration to the people, "the state of our enemies. They are called in dede princes, but they be very tyrants: they care not for you: they take your goods, and spend them wickedly in pride, riot, and voluptuousness: and, for light causes, move warres which destroy all that the pore have left, these be theyr princelik vertues. In the place of the widow and orphane, they mainteine the Bishoppe of Romes auctoritie, and wickednesse of the cleargie, where youthe shoulde be brought up in learnyng, and the poore releved, they establishe the marchandise of massing, and other abominations. Thinke you your God will suffer this any longer?"

When brought as a prisoner before the magistrates, and asked why he had misled the poor and simple people, "he answered that he had done nothinge but his dewtie." He was put to the rack and executed. "At the houre of death, beyng invironed with soldiours, he exhorted the princes that they would shewe more mercy to poore men, and read over diligently the books of scripture that are written of kynghes. He had no sooner spoken thus, but the sword was in the neck of him, and, for an example, his head set up on a pole in the middes of the feldes."—"Sleidane's Commentaries, translated out of Latin into English, by John Daus. The fiftie booke."

Note 2. "*Render the feeling of compassion less prompt and deep.*"—Page 98.

For a confirmation of the view which I have given of the state of slavery under the Roman empire, Sismondi's "*History of the Fall of the Roman Empire*" may be consulted (chap. i.). Had Dr. Channing's noble Treatise on Slavery reached this country when I was preparing this Lecture, the following impressive picture of Roman slavery would have occupied, as a quotation, the place of the foregoing passage.

"Let us now ask, What was slavery in the age of Paul? It was the slavery, not so much of black as of white men, not merely of barbarians, but of Greeks, not merely of the ignorant and debased, but of the virtuous, educated, and refined. Piracy and conquest were the chief means of supplying the slave-market, and they heeded neither character nor condition. Sometimes the greater part of the population of a captured city was sold into bondage, sometimes the whole, as in the case of Jerusalem. Noble and royal families, the rich and great, the learned and powerful, the philosopher and poet, the wisest and best men, were condemned to the chain. Such was ancient slavery. And this we are told is allowed and confirmed by the word of God! Had Napoleon, on capturing Berlin or Vienna, doomed most or the whole of their inhabitants to bondage; had he seized on venerable matrons, the mothers of illustrious men, who were reposing, after virtuous lives, in the bosom of grateful families; had he seized on the delicate, refined, beautiful young woman, whose education had prepared her to grace the sphere in which God had placed her, whose plighted love had opened before her visions of bliss, and over all whose prospects the freshest hopes and most glowing imaginations of early life were breathed; had he seized on the minister of religion, the man of science, the man of genius, the sage, the guides of the world; had he scattered these through the slave-markets of the world, and transferred them to the highest bidders at public auction, the men to be converted into instruments of slavish toil, the women into instruments of lust, and both to endure whatever indignities and torture absolute power can inflict; we should then have had a picture, in the present age, of slavery as it existed in the time of Paul."—"Channing on Slavery," p. 109.

Note 3. "*Nothing to remind him of Jesus the crucified.*"—Page 99.

I beg to direct my readers' attention to the following expression of a similar sentiment, by Sir James Mackintosh:—

"It is impossible, I think, to look into the interior of any religious sect without thinking better of it. I ought, indeed, to confine myself to those of Christian Europe; but, with that limitation, it seems to me that the remark is true—whether I look at the Jansenists of Port Royal, or at the Quakers in Clarkson, or the Methodists in the journals. All these sects which appear dangerous or ridiculous at a distance assume a much more amiable character



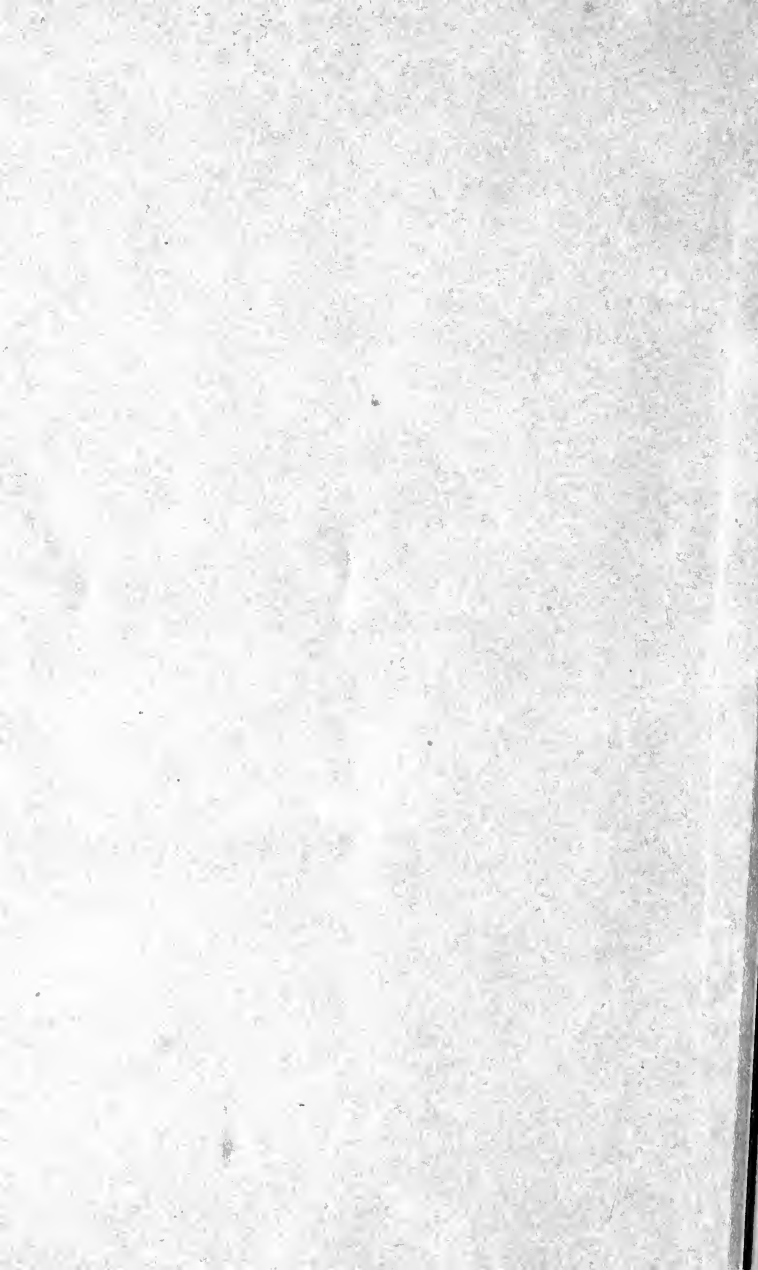
on nearer inspection. They all inculcate pure virtue, and practice mutual kindness; and they exert great force of reason in rescuing their doctrines from the absurd or pernicious consequences which naturally flow from them. Much of this arises from the general nature of religious principle; much also from the genius of the Gospel morality, so meek and affectionate that it can soften barbarians, and warm even sophists themselves. Something, doubtless, depends on the civilization of Europe; for the character of Christian sects in Asia is not so distinguished."—*Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh*, vol. ii. pp. 54, 55.

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